

A 21st Century Look At The Old Testament



by Mark Barbee

www.firstcenturyministry.com

Preface

After five books on the New Testament, it seemed good to work on something that would introduce people to the Old Testament from both an information and inspiration viewpoint. However, modern readers are trained to be skeptical, so it also needed an apologetics element. I decided to raise issues of skeptics over the last century, and use my fictional professor to relate discoveries and answers to those issues. Matt Burns represents a minority of American professors today who do have faith in Jesus Christ and the Bible. They are scattered everywhere throughout academia. While liberal scholars are often quoted in the modern media, there are many conservatives out there. The answers to the questions herein can be found in the writings of many of those conservative scholars, as I have found them over the last forty years.

But this is really nothing new. There have always been skeptics, and there have always been defenders of the faith. Ultimately, it is a step of faith to decide who to believe. But it is not blind faith to believe in the God of the Bible and to believe in an inspired record that has come down to us through God's prophets through millennia. The evidence is there for those who will look with an open mind. And that is what I pray you will have as you take this journey with Matt Burns.

I am indebted to a good education at both Ohio State University and Cincinnati Christian Seminary for my background. But I am also indebted to many authors and scholars whom I have read over the years. I hope that some of the discoveries I have made will inspire you to greater faith in God the father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is by no means just a matter of ancient history. There are many principles that apply to our lives and culture today. We need this foundation if we are ever to get back to the Judeo-Christian foundation that has made Western Civilization great.

Moreover, these are both fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, and some very exciting ones yet to be fulfilled. This should excite us far more than Nostradamus or a host of secular or pagan prophets.

I have included a study guide of over one hundred questions to help you grasp the highlights of the Old Testament and the applications to our lives today.

Mark Barbee
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Matt Burns Meets the Old Testament

Modern man needs to be reintroduced to the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole. When this is done properly, there is every reason to accept the Scriptures as divinely inspired accounts of history and redemption. In this study we will look at concepts about God and the Bible that Secular Man often rejects without even giving consideration to them.

Matt Burns pondered what he had discovered so far. He had researched ancient manuscripts and found that the New Testament documents were reliable first century works by eyewitnesses of Jesus. But as a professor at Columbia University he had been familiar with a lot of dismissive attitudes toward the Bible and particularly the Old Testament.

Yes, there are fantastic stories in the Bible, beginning on page one. But just because they are not given in modern terminology is no reason to reject them out of hand. Burns was aware of a powerful anti-supernatural bias among modern Americans. Was the Old Testament just a book of myths and legends?

The Old Testament is a group of books written by divinely inspired prophets of Israel from about 1500 B.C. to 400 B.C. They consist of the books of Moses (five), the histories (12), the poetic books (5) and the prophets (17). This is a total of 39 books originally written in Hebrew. They were collected and revered by Israel long before the coming of Jesus and the New Testament. They were actually translated into Greek about 250 B.C.

Burns decided that he would try to answer some of the tough questions of critics by actually researching the Bible itself. The Jewish people have always called the books of Moses the Torah. He decided to begin by looking at these five books and summarize the lessons God gives us. He hoped that his wife Esther, who had been raised in the Jewish faith, would be able to

give him some insights. He would also look to some friends that he had met during his journey to faith.

The Old Testament is the story of the Hebrew people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Since Jacob's other name was Israel, his descendants became known as the Israelites (to distinguish them from other sons of Abraham through Ishmael).

Then, during the Exodus and Kingdom periods they are known as Israel. Later, the northern tribes were taken into captivity and disappeared as a people. Only Judah and Benjamin were left. So by the time of 500 B.C. to the birth of Christ they became known as the Jews (short for Judah).

How did the Genesis events make sense? What about the Creation account? How could a flood cover the earth? How did two million people escape from Egypt and cross the Red Sea? Was the Old Testament God a God of wrath or a balance of love and mercy? Why was there so much violence in the Old Testament? Would Matt's faith be strengthened in this journey or would his doubts increase? These are questions he hoped to answer.



Genesis 1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening and there was morning—the second day. And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the land produce

vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

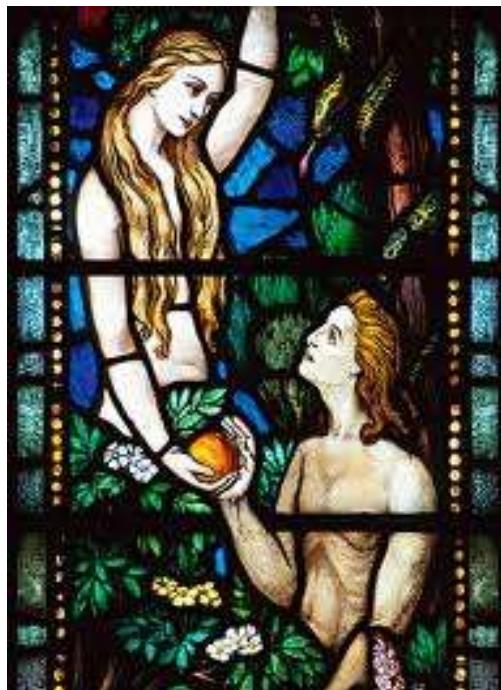
And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created

*him: male and female he created them. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth and every tree...They will be yours for food...God saw all that he had made and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day. **

Related Reading- Genesis 2-5



*All quotations from the New International Version of the Bible unless noted – c. 1973, 1978, 1984

Chapter One

A Contemporary Look at Genesis

Genesis is the book of beginnings. For millennia it was a sourcebook of origins, of man and the universe. More recently it has been consigned to the category of myth and legend. But there are many reasons to revisit this amazing book and see it as the answer to many questions about the world around us.

Many people educated in today's secular system have concluded that this book is irrelevant because evolution has answered many origin issues. (Matt had been one of those people. But he had discovered the historical accuracy of the New Testament and put his faith in a supernatural God.) "Out with Genesis and in with Darwin"; so they say. Because Genesis is difficult to understand in some of its content, it is rejected in favor of the evolution myth. However, evolution does not answer any of the "why" questions about life. It may suggest a mechanism, but still fails to explain the origins of the universe and mankind and the origin of the simplest form of life. In fact, before you reject the Bible because it seems far-fetched, consider how far-fetched recent evolutionary theory has become! There are huge gaps in the theory. When anyone confronts one of these, such as the origin of life, the question is simply pushed back to "it was planted here from outer space", which still does not answer the question. The once popular "spontaneous generation" has been discounted because of the complexity of even one amino acid or protein, much less the number it takes for a single living cell.

Genesis was written to answer the why questions. It assumes a limitless God who exists outside of his creation. He determined to create the universe, with earth as the central focus (the Bible never says that the earth is the center of the universe). Astronomy continues to show the uniqueness of earth despite our vastly improved ability to see into space. After He had created a perfect home for man, God said, "let us make man in our own

image”. Lest that seem too simple, let’s not confuse simple with simplistic. Given the failures and gaps of evolutionary theory, the biblical account is quite straightforward and refreshing. Though scientists have searched for the “missing links” or “transitional forms” for the past 150 years, they have yet to find any proof supporting these theories. Given the time frame, there should be hundreds of transitional forms.

Throughout this journey Matt Burns will use the term “Secular Man” to represent the critics of the Bible. Sometimes they will introduce good questions that shed light on the truth. Other times they will reveal their cynical bias from a secular education that relegates the Bible to “myth and legend”. Many initial questions or shallow criticisms are answered right in the Bible or through some basic reasoning.

Matt Burns was motivated to defend the faith because it had brought a change in his life. He wanted to gain fresh perspectives on the Bible from a variety of sources, not just the liberal mainstream which had sold out to unproven theories.

What You Don’t Know About Genesis

Why do people reject the book so easily? For modern man, part of the answer to this is that people know very little about the book and many have never read it. Bringing a skeptical approach to it can cause us to miss the profound truths. For example, critics are quick to point out discrepancies between chapters one and two. This approach shows a great ignorance about literature and about the context of the book.

Very simply, the chapter one account of creation goes back to the dawn of time. It is a hymn that generally describes how God created the heavens and the earth. As such it falls more into the category of poetry than anything like a scientific explanation. It may very well have been revealed by God directly to Adam.

Modern man has to remember that modern science is only 200 years old. For most of human history people did not require a scientific approach. Nor did the author Moses feel the need to present a logical sequence as we westerners might have done it. Genesis one introduces God as One who needs no introduction. His creative power makes it evident that he is beyond time and space as we know it. The theological word for that is “transcendent”. On the other hand, Genesis One does not contradict proven science.

When Moses wrote Genesis, much of it was a compilation of earlier records that had been passed down for centuries. The clue to this is the phrase “these are the generations of” appearing every few chapters. The first eleven chapters of Genesis might have been collected by Abraham and passed down through his family, ultimately traveling with Jacob’s family to Egypt. Moses acted as editor to bring the Genesis account up to the sojourn in Egypt (1440 B.C.). That set the stage for Exodus and all that happened in his lifetime.

So, Moses starts with the summary of creation, then goes back for a second, more detailed look. The name for God in the chapter one hymn is *Elohim*. Beginning in chapter two, Moses uses the compound LORD God. This is the combining of God, *Elohim*, with the more personal name *Yahweh*. *Yahweh* is the name God gave Moses when appearing in the burning bush. It means I Am or the self-existent one. So Moses is saying, “the same God of creation is the one who appeared to me at Sinai, which I haven’t gotten to yet.” *Yahweh* has always been rendered LORD (all caps) in English translations, to distinguish it from the other Hebrew word for Lord, which was *Adonai*.

Radical critics have misinterpreted these names as a sign of a later editor, rather than Moses himself. Instead of simply believing what had always been maintained by the Jews that Moses wrote it, they were enamored with a nineteenth century conclusion that no one could write in the time of Moses. This was proven wrong, but never taken into account by liberal critics who

continued under false suppositions. They also misled many by applying the evolutionary theory to history and the writing of the Bible. Thus they cast doubts on the Bible throughout the twentieth century. More than that, they stumbled over anything miraculous and assumed that such accounts were myths that developed later after historical events.

Matt decided to ask the pastor of the messianic congregation where he and Esther attended for some insights. This was a congregation friendly to Jewish people who had accepted Jesus, or Yeshua as their Messiah. The pastor was named Samuel, or Pastor Sam, as he was commonly called.

“I’m excited about your book project, Matt,” Sam encouraged.

“Thanks, I’m just sharing my journey.”

Sam weighed in on this subject: “Those who accept the logic of a supernatural creator God that is beyond space, matter and time have no trouble here—that God created man in his image as a thinking, communicating being, and had no trouble communicating with his special creation. So chapter one was *revealed to Adam*. Once one accepts a God who is beyond space and time, all the miracles follow logically.

“Those who can see that chapter two is simply a more detailed restating of creation with the focus on man, begin to see the spiritual and moral history of man. Who is to say that the Creator who made Adam and Eve, could not also teach them speech and even the idea of writing?”

In fact, one of Matt Burn’s friends liked to say that Genesis could not have been written before the first millennium B.C. because no one could write in those times. Other secularists say that “we have no evidence of writing before 2000 B.C.” However, lack of archaeological evidence is far from proof. They also ignore that the Bible itself is evidence! But they were also proven wrong

when cuneiform tablets were discovered in Babylonia from at least 2,000 B.C., the time of Abraham himself! This was also the very location where Abraham lived before migrating to Palestine. Abraham could very likely have been a learned member of his society. Similarly, Moses was not a desert chieftain. He was raised in Pharaoh's palace at a time when the Egyptian civilization was most advanced. In other words, the most ancient authors of the Bible had access to the most advanced cultures of their day. Abraham passed the story of the early Patriarchs on to his sons, who passed it on down to the time of Moses.

Secularists also neglect to mention that there are no cultural records much before 2500 B.C. (It seems that only godly writers will point this out because it supports the idea of a cataclysmic event that destroyed cultural evidence before that time.) Maybe they are embarrassed by this gap since they maintain that man goes back hundreds of thousands of years.

Could that cataclysm have been a universal flood? Most cultures do have traditions of a great flood and a pre-flood world that was catastrophically destroyed. Hmm. Why would such myths be so prevalent? Instead of seeing a universal pattern here and common origin of these legends, most liberal scholars would rather discount the evidence. They point out that the Gilgamesh epic is older because it is polytheistic. This is based on the popular belief that monotheism was a late development. This stems from evolutionary thinking about "primitive man". These are, of course, assumptions, not proven fact. But such circular reasoning does not explain the ancient flood story of the Chinese culture, which was also monotheistic.

The Lie of the Cave Man

Matt Burns wondered about the common view of primitive man that we have been indoctrinated with. So when do the cave men fit in?

Since early man was the special creation of God, he did not rise from ignorance and small brain capacity. He came forth fully formed in God's image. But as soon as evolutionists succeeded in planting the lie of the cave man, they skewed our reasoning and logic. But what if early man was not a dumb, ignorant savage, but a reasoning being like us? Adam and Eve were created with the capacity to think and feel and communicate. Who knows how much information God downloaded to them? God communicated to them with commands about caring for the garden, eating of all the trees except one, and relating to their Creator. In fact, we are told that God "walked with them" in the garden. Thus the story begins with a relationship between God and people.

Prior to Eve's creation, God had led or instructed Adam to name all the animals. Perhaps this was to show Adam that no other creature was just like him and that he needed a soul mate. One day Adam fell asleep (under God's anesthetic) and God performed divine surgery on him, taking a rib and forming Eve. Thus, when he woke, he discovered a companion who was "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone".¹ He had enough sense to know that this beautiful creature was nothing like an ape!

That pattern is repeated in every generation as men and women find each other and know they are meant to be together. But just as sin entered into Adam and Eve's relationship, sin also breaks down many marriages. It is only "walking with God" that will allow us to overcome the difficulties that sin creates in marriage. It is only the self-denial that Jesus taught that will solve the problem of two spouses both wanting their own "rights".

When they were created, they were "naked and not ashamed". Just as in the beginning, marriage requires a transparency and humility, a sharing of responsibilities based on communication. When sin occurs, we must look to God for a solution and for forgiveness—just as Adam and Eve ultimately did.

¹ Genesis 2:23

At God's questioning them about the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve for something for which he was equally responsible. At any rate, the serpent questioned God's word. Eve bit on the temptation and then on the forbidden fruit. We usually picture Eve alone with the serpent, but Adam was probably standing right there watching instead of warning! God wasn't going to buy their excuses and they forfeited paradise. Their lives would be more difficult, laboring by the sweat of their brows, pain in childbirth, thorns and thistles working against them. God pronounced that they would ultimately die, and death entered the creation.

There is no evidence at all that the forbidden fruit was a sexual relationship. Adam and Eve were given that privilege and no doubt enjoyed it. This is read into the story by those who mistakenly think that God is against sex, instead of against illicit sex. Some sects of Christianity have mistakenly taught this.

Many struggle with the role of the talking serpent. It just seems too much like a fairy tale. Yet, when one reads later that God created spiritual beings called angels and that some of them rebelled against God, things begin to fall into place. Angels take on various forms in the Scripture, sometimes speaking through man and sometimes through beasts. This is neither a common occurrence, nor is it impossible for spiritual beings. And so we come to understand that Satan is speaking through the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve to disobey God. They listened and made a choice to disobey. Burns realized that Satan works the same way today, asking man "has God really said?"

But God also demonstrated his grace by sacrificing animals and clothing Adam and Eve with skins. This is a picture of God covering our sin and giving us a covering of righteousness. Until Christ, animal sacrifice was required to show the cost of sin and forgiveness. Then Christ became the Lamb of God slain for all of us.

So in the first three chapters of Genesis emerges the pattern that is with us to this day:

God creates each of us with natural capacity (free will) for good or evil. He gives us a few simple rules for our good.

Satan, the serpent, tempts us to misuse or abuse the creation by bringing before us the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life (I John 2:16 KJV). (In Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, this is represented by the Ring of Power.)

In just a few generations mankind fell to the lowest degradations that we still see today:

Sexual lust and perversion (misuse of bodies)
Addictions to alcohol, plants, etc.
Murder and envy

Secular Man: What about those stories of men living hundreds of years?

By Genesis six God made plans to destroy mankind and start over. It is estimated that 1600 years elapsed between creation and the flood. Several generations saw man's descent into low living and ignorance. People lived long ages for two possible reasons—one is that the genetics had not been weakened to the point of hereditary diseases. And two, the climate was milder at the time with broad semi-tropic zones. The earliest patriarchs lived for two thirds of this time period. Christians believe that one day we'll receive an immortal physical body (I Cor. 15), so why should we stumble at this? The earth itself was also better balanced before the flood and poised to last forever. Burns remembered reading in Henry Morris's *The Genesis Record* that the earth had smaller deserts then and has gradually become more arid from new prevailing wind patterns since the flood.

The biblical record shows that man lived in community from the very beginning. Does this mean that men never lived in caves? Of course not. Caves were probably used temporarily until houses and cities could be built. But these early men were certainly more intelligent than the Neanderthal we have pictured.

Yet, in their sin, early man sunk to a low level. The record says that “*every inclination of the thoughts of man was only evil all the time.*” And God’s heart was filled with pain at this degradation. In 6:11 it also says that the “*earth was corrupt and full of violence.*” Though man had a greater capacity, he began to act like a cave man.

But Noah was a righteous man and found favor in the eyes of the Lord because he walked with God (6:8, 9).



Genesis 6 and 7

God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the

earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” Noah did everything just as God commanded him...

The Lord then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family because I have found you righteous in your generation...Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all the creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.²

Related Reading- Genesis 6-11

² Gen. 6:12-22, Gen. 7:6-12

Chapter Two

More on the Flood of Noah

Matt Burns had spoken with a geology professor once who said, “It is impossible for the entire earth to have been covered by a flood. And forty days of rain would certainly not do it. The story of Noah is just about a local flood.” But Burns thought about a visit he had made to a creationist’s museum in Kentucky. The founder’s name is Ken Ham, and his ministry is called Answers in Genesis.

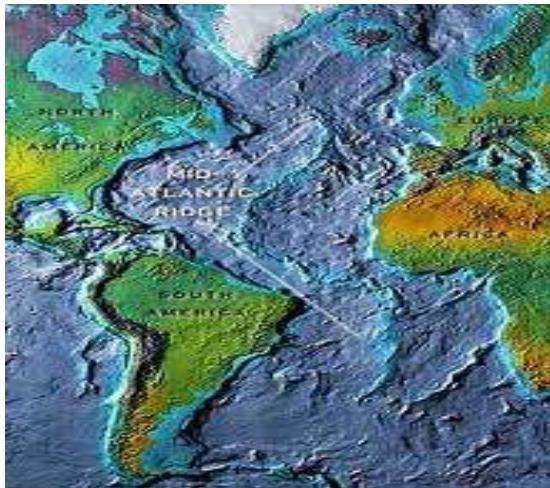
Ken Ham is fond of saying that if there had been a world wide flood there would be “millions of dead things laid down in sedimentary layers by water all over the earth.” That is, of course, exactly what we find. It’s called the fossil record. Both sides agree that it is there. But they have very different interpretations of what it means.

Geologists will be the first to tell you that there are evidences of massive changes in the earth’s crust. Their assumption is that this all came from gradual, *uniformitarian* processes over millions of years. When philosopher scientists want to dress up a lie, they always come up with a fancy name for it. This was predicted in II Peter 3: 4-7.

They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

Moreover, there are many geologic features that are better explained by rapid, cataclysmic processes of a universal flood:

Sea floor spreading, continental drift
Mid Atlantic Ridge
Uplifted mountains, particularly the younger systems
Elevated sea level—three hundred feet higher than in ancient times
Ice ages
Salt deposits- left from underground seas
Erosion rate of continents shows they are young
Universal marine fossils
Rifts and volcanism
The Grand Canyon (More in minute!)



Sea floor spreading and continental drift

Here's a surprise: modern creation scientists do not maintain that the flood was caused entirely by rain! The Bible clearly states that the flood started with the "fountains of the great deep bursting forth"³. The forty days of rain was secondary to that. Apparently triggered by an earthquake, there were vast underground reservoirs that burst forth in a chain reaction that split

³ Gen. 7:11

the earth's crust. The weight of the continents shifting would have spewed the waters miles into the atmosphere along with volcanic dust. This would set a chain reaction in motion that would be many times what we saw at the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in 1980. The cloud of debris from that one volcano affected the climate across the United States for an entire year. Multiply that times world-wide volcanic activity and crustal shifting and mountain building, and you have major climate changes and ice ages.

Burns decided to interview a pastor friend who had taught about this.

“Mark, would you tell me about this theory again.”

The pastor replied, “I first heard this scenario explained by NASA scientist Walter Brown at a seminar in 1983. He gave excellent facts for the proof of the flood, including the above list of geologic features. Since then, Ken Ham and others have used his research for inspiration.

“In fact, it appears that several events in recent history demonstrate the truth of the biblical account. When I was in college geology, the mid- oceanic ridges and sea floor spreading had just been discovered. Then, in 1980, Mt. St. Helens demonstrated the amazing processes of volcanism and erosion in just a short period of time, including the formation of major canyons. The dust cloud stayed in the atmosphere for months and affected climate across North America. Then, just a few years ago we saw the massive power of a tsunami in the Indian Ocean.”

Burns summarized some other relevant facts: looking at the average elevation of land masses and sea floors around the world, if the crust were leveled out, the entire world would be covered with 6000- 10,000 feet of water. So the water is definitely there in sufficient quantity. And most people know that three fourths of the earth is already covered with water. The result of crustal shifts during and after the flood raised the sea level in some places to more than 300 feet higher than it had been previously.

Telling a Friend

One day Burns was sharing this with a friend on the Columbia campus named Jim. Jim said, “So you’re telling me there is actually a scientific way of looking at the Genesis account? It’s not just a bunch of fairy tales?”

Burns replied, “Genesis can be rephrased in modern terminology. ‘In the beginning, God created the space/mass/time universe.’ This presupposes that God is outside of time and space. He is a spirit far greater than anything within creation. When he created ‘light’, he created all the energy in the universe. Because he is outside of time, past, present and future are all the same to him. That is why He knows the end from the beginning. That’s why prophecy is easy for him.

“It is also important to note that the creative power was in God’s spoken word! He spoke and these things came into existence. Many people do not start with this kind of God and start at the other end, trying to imagine a being just a little more powerful than man. Their God is too small!”

Jim countered, “But don’t most scientists reject the Bible accounts?”

Burns continued, “Yes, the majority do. But there are hundreds of PhD scientists who accept creationism and who do not accept evolution. This is not to say that they reject adaptation and other features of microevolution. But the Darwinian theory of change from one species to another, is full of holes.

“There has been a conspiracy in the academic community for decades to silence creationists or anyone who holds to intelligent design. Because of man wanting freedom from moral restraint, the academic community has been very friendly to

theories that prop up evolution, while ignoring evidence against it. The theory has become status quo without ever being proven. Dating schemes are based on unproven assumptions. Let's call this the "dating game". Paleontologists and geologists play a game of circular reasoning, each basing his time frame on the other. 'This fossil must be this old because it's found in this layer', says the paleontologist. The geologist says, 'this layer must be this old because of the fossil found in it.' Both assume slow processes that never altered in the past. The true geologic column is a lot simpler than those found in textbooks and not indicative of the vast time scales portrayed in the column usually pictured.

Burns recalled how a drawing and a hoax were big parts of human evolution in years past. For example, the ape- to- man drawing has been accepted as scientific for years since it first appeared in evolutionary mouthpieces such as *National Geographic*. Hoaxes such as the Neanderthal man were foisted upon the public without proof, then later disproved. Neanderthal was simply a malformed human. Other "missing links" were established with as little as a tooth. Many assumptions are often made from skeletons.

"Dating methods such as Carbon 14 and Potassium Argon are based on unproven assumptions, and the former is only accurate back a few thousand years. These methods have been used to prop up evolution.

"Following their unproven theories, evolutionists have taken over geology, museums, and the media. They have used dinosaurs as their ambassadors. However, there are increasing numbers of skeptics about the time frame of dinosaurs. There is some evidence that dinosaurs roamed the earth with man."

"You're presenting a radically different view from what I've heard," Jim said.

"Yes, but look at what illogical and unproven assumptions there are in evolution? We've already mentioned the circular

reasoning in dating schemes. The lack of hard evidence is revealed by such statements as “most experts agree...” That statement proves that an opinion, not a fact, is being stated. Evolutionists like to point to the Grand Canyon as a great specimen of geological ages. But that is all based on a uniformitarian view that the processes have always occurred at the same rate. What if there was a lot more water in a short period of time? There is actually more evidence for that view than for the uniformitarian view.”

The Birth of Creation Science

Many secularists today assume that the evolutionary theory has always been dominant and is the only “scientific” theory.

But in the late sixties, Dr. Henry Morris wrote a ground-breaking book about a scientific approach to Noah’s Flood. One great contribution of the book, *The Genesis Flood*, was its calculations of the size of the ark and its capacity to hold all the animals necessary. He calculated the capacity as equivalent to 522 railroad stockcars. Considering the average size of the ten thousand major species, the ark had more than enough room for all the animal pairs. In many cases the younger ones are much smaller than adults. So there was enough room for the animals and the eight souls on board and all the supplies they would need. Thus, the ark was also adequate for smaller pairs of dinosaurs to be included. While it may seem novel to some, most creationists believe that the flood itself was responsible for the extinction and rapid burial of most of the dinosaurs.

Morris went on to start the Institute for Creation Research in California. Many scientists have become members of this group over the last few decades, including paleontologist Dr. Duane Gish. Together he and Morris began to challenge the assumptions of the evolutionary community. Other creation organizations have formed around the world with scientists from many nations. Dr. Andrew Snelling of Australia is a current advocate of flood

geology, as is Dr. John Morris. Dr. John Morris is fond of using the Grand Canyon to disprove evolution!

More recently, Dr. Michael Behe, a biologist has critiqued the theory of evolution. Michael Denton has written a book called *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*.

Astronomers and physicists have advocated the Big Bang theory of origin for the universe. One conclusion of this theory that agrees with the Bible is that the universe had a beginning. This may be a step in the right direction, although they still hold to astronomical ages of the universe and stars (pardon the pun). One physicist named Dr. Hugh Ross, holds to the big bang theory, but that God guided it to produce the fine tuning in the universe. The constants of gravity, barometric pressure, magnetic fields, etc., point to a Designer. There are over thirty of these natural laws that point to design.

On and on the list of dissenters to evolution goes and grows. These are men and women that have recognized degrees from established universities, yet have often been shut out of the debate.

Recently the humorist Ben Stein did a movie on the threat to academic freedom in our nation. It is called “Expelled”. He documents and interviews many scientists who have lost their jobs for even questioning evolution, or advocating Intelligent Design. More on that in a moment.

Language and Polytheism

Burns had noted that cultures all seem to go back to about 2500-3,000 B.C. This would have been about the time of the biblical event called the Tower of Babel. Even Egyptian dynasties, which appear to go back further, could actually include pre-flood kings. Within a few centuries of the flood’s destruction, the

descendants of Noah had multiplied again on the face of the earth. By this time there was once again a population of many millions. This time they decided to unionize:

Genesis 11:4-7

And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

They united against the management of God. What laws and restrictions they had from God did not please them. So under a charismatic leader named Nimrod, they organized a new religion and focused their efforts on building a tower to the heavens. This was the beginning of polytheism. This began the whole astrological worship of sun, moon and stars as well as other deities.

There is no evolutionary explanation that explains the language differences in the world today. While there are language families, they do not seem to derive from a common origin. Moreover, the Tower of Babel is more than a story of language and dispersal. The builders of Babel were rebels against God and were setting up the worship of the heavenly bodies (unto the heavens). Admittedly, the translation of the Hebrew here is misleading. Even the NIV is no help when it says “reaches to the heavens”. However, the intent of this idiom may be no different from the



builders of modern skyscrapers who say “let’s build the highest building around”. Once again, those who attribute the greatest naiveté to early man assume that they thought they could literally reach the sky.

Yet, the veracity of the original story is reflected in the pyramids and ziggurats of several ancient cultures. The propensity to build high buildings for religious purposes has always been with mankind. So if I could take my evolutionary glasses off for a moment, I could actually see many truths in the biblical account. And why did the native peoples of the western hemisphere build pyramids as well?

Some twenty-five hundred years after Babel, in AD 30, God did another miracle of language. On the Day of Pentecost, when the Church was born, the apostles spoke in many languages they did not learn, thus signifying God’s unification of the earth in the invisible kingdom of Christ.

“I see you’re writing about the early chapters of Genesis,” commented Matt’s wife Esther.

“Yes, it’s been a great journey so far,” answered Matt.

“And did you mention Henry Morris’s book on Genesis?”

“Not yet. I talked about his founding of the Creation Research Institute.”

“I think you should mention his book on *The Genesis Record*.⁴ You know Matt, I really never understood Genesis until I read his book. It was amazing!”

“You’re right Esther,” Matt agreed. “I really should include it here.”

⁴ Dr. Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1976.

What Matt didn't tell Esther was that he was already drawing upon Dr. Morris's commentary to understand these Genesis passages.

The Implications of Design

When one reaches the inescapable conclusion that there is design in the universe, it is not far to a personal God. Why, for example, is man so different from the animals? Evolutionists have been trying to blur the distinction for a hundred years, but most people don't buy it. Have you ever seen monkeys in the zoo organize any debating societies, hospitals, museums, schools, etc.? I may be a monkey's uncle, but there are no monkeys in my ancestry.

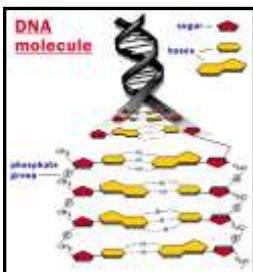
Speaking of schools, secular evolutionists have had control of the school systems for more than forty years, but have made no progress convincing the majority that there is no Creator. The number of atheists and agnostics today is the same as 30 years ago according to recent polls. There are, however, a lot of theistic evolutionists who are trying to compromise God's truth with a bad theory. Yet, there is no doubt that evolution controls academia. This was pointed out recently in Ben Stein's aforementioned movie, which chronicles the loss of academic freedom in America. He is one truth-seeking Jewish man who dared to go against the flow by interviewing a number of scientists who have lost their positions in recent years. Meanwhile, much of the mainline church (older denominations) has caved in to evolutionists. Theistic evolutionists try to have it both ways. In Stein's documentary, he goes on to interview some well-known atheists who rely upon evolution to prop up their anti-god philosophy. He wisely allows them to expose the fallacies in their own arguments.

In an earlier age, Unitarians tried to fit the triune God into their rationalism. Because God didn't fit, they rejected the trinity.

Soon, other cardinal doctrines of the faith, such as the inspiration of Scripture and deity of Christ were also rejected. Today the Unitarians are the most liberal (universalist) group that still calls itself Christian. Yet, they deny that Christ is the only way to God. (They have close ties with the United Church of Christ.)

The pattern has always been to undermine that which challenges the faith or stretches the imagination. In so doing they have created their own god—one they can understand and be comfortable with. But the Sovereign God of the universe will not allow us to put him in any box or limit him by our definitions.

The true God has his way. He is God and we are not. He still commands respect, holy fear and awe. We'll get back to that thought in a moment.



Now it is the evolutionists who stretch logic and imagination to the breaking point, insisting there is no design. Despite the discovery of DNA and the complex particles within atoms, they still deny design. They ask us to believe that it all came about by accidents over billions of years, or that if life didn't begin here, it came from outer space.

How convenient. They rob God of his glory and personify chance and natural selection. They will say ridiculous things like “it's almost as if evolution had a plan.” They are logically inconsistent. Another recent outrage is the idea that dinosaurs came from birds.

Not too long ago, one of their philosophers broke ranks. Anthony Flew flew out of the evolutionary cuckoo's nest. He admitted that DNA was too complex to have happened without a designer. Others like Philip Johnson have questioned the prevailing evolutionary arguments.⁵

⁵ *Darwin on Trial* by Philip Johnson. See *Darwin's Nemesis* by William Demski; *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* by Michael Denton; *Darwin's Black Box* by Michael Behe.

It has been said that Darwin’s doubts in Christianity were based on these ideas: that natural selection eliminated the need for design; that the Old Testament God was a vengeful tyrant, not good and gracious; that miracles of the New Testament were tales by ignorant and credulous men; that there were contradictions in the gospels; that God would not send people to hell, and that pain and suffering in nature deny the existence of a merciful God.

There are good, consistent answers for all these issues, but Darwin and others chose not to accept the answers. For example, God did not create a universe of suffering, pain and death. God created a paradise where everything was in harmony and balance. The food chain was unnecessary and predators were vegetarians. Man changed that through sin. That’s when death entered the picture. Hell is man’s choice and God does not force himself on those who will not receive him. There are no contradictions in the gospels, only differences that can be easily explained. Miracles were well attested by credible and often educated men. The Old Testament God was not an ogre as he is often portrayed. He was just and merciful then just as he is now. Because he is just, he does not let sin go unpunished forever. Although his patience can extend for hundreds of years before judgment falls. Finally, design is far too complex and pervasive to have happened by chance. Burns had learned, however, that while many skeptics enjoyed raising these issues, few wanted to really listen to explanations.

While evolutionists have been looking for the “missing link” between apes and man, the real missing link is in their heads! If man were more like the animals, such thinking might make sense. But there are obvious differences between us and the apes, or we wouldn’t be having this conversation! Evolution has become a bandwagon in our society and has played a destructive role in other societies. Take Russia, Germany and China, for example. They submitted to no higher law than the state, built their theories on evolution (see Ben Stein’s movie if you don’t believe it) and justified everything from abortion to genocide. China still follows a forced abortion policy to control family size

and population growth. Is this the kind of society that America wants, where the state is God and courts control our lives?⁶

Genesis 12: 1-7

The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you: I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 22: 6-14

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and the wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁶ Recently (2010), TV host Glenn Beck has done a good job of documenting the evolution/eugenics/genocide connection.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in the thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD will provide.

Related Reading- Genesis 12-50

Chapter Three

The Patriarchs of a Nation

“Honey, will you get your nose out of that manuscript and help me with the groceries?” Esther had just arrived home.

“Okay, Babe, just finishing the part on evolution and Genesis.”

“So you’re getting ready to start with Abraham, the father of my people?”

“Yes, do you have any thoughts?”

Esther was the love of Matt’s life. They were both nearly forty when they fell in love. Matt had undergone a spiritual awakening. She was a fellow professor at Columbia. After having struck out with her in his B.C. days (Before Christ), they had found a common spiritual bond. Though she was Jewish, she became intrigued with his fresh faith. As a result she had accepted Yeshua as her Messiah. Now they had a wonderful spiritual connection. They attended a messianic congregation with people from both Gentile and Jewish backgrounds.

After a few moments of reflection, Esther replied, “Just that Abraham was known for his faith in setting out for a land that God had ‘shown’ him. Through his obedience he became a ‘friend of God’ and father of many nations.”

“Thanks Honey, I’ll let you know what I come up with.” He continued writing:

Abraham and the patriarchs show us that faith and obedience bring blessing. Abraham is often called the Father of Faith and Friend of God. He leaves Ur of Chaldees (Babylon)

around 2,000 B.C. and follows God's leading to Canaan. He dwells there for several years before he finally is given a son of promise. However before that, in a moment of doubt, he fathers a son by a concubine named Hagar. But Ishmael is not the son of promise or covenant. Ishmael becomes the father of many (twelve) Arab peoples.

Finally, at a ripe old age, God causes Sarah to conceive and she bears Isaac. In a few short years, God tests Abraham by asking him to take Isaac up on a mountain and sacrifice him. At the last minute, God provides a ram (male lamb) for the sacrifice. This is a picture of something that will be acted out 2,000 years later by God and his Son Jesus. Most Bible scholars think that the mountain where Abraham took Isaac is the same one where Christ was crucified. Indeed, Gordon's Calvary and the garden tomb in Jerusalem are on the same ridge as the temple mount.



Not much more is known of Isaac except that he searches for a bride from his father's house. This becomes symbolic of Christ seeking a bride from among God's people. Those who accept Jesus become his bride.

Isaac has two troubled sons, Jacob and Esau. It is important to note that many accounts in the biblical record are not necessarily endorsed by God, but appear there because they truly happened to His people. At first Jacob treats Esau deceitfully, stealing his birthright. Then Esau is so angry that Jacob flees for his life and is gone for a number of years (more than twenty). Through a sequence of events, Jacob is humbled so that God can once again use him. He is blessed with twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel.

But all is not well in Jacob's family either. The ten older sons are very jealous of the eleventh son who is Jacob's favorite.

The insult is made worse by the coat of many colors that Jacob bestowed on Joseph. This blatant favoritism shows that even the great patriarchs were foolish at times.

Although it may help to understand that Joseph and Benjamin were the sons of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, the one that he had fallen in love with first. Rachel had been barren for many years while Jacob fathered sons with Leah and two concubines. When Joseph and Benjamin came along, he favored them. Unfortunately, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. Eventually, the favored son Joseph is sold by his own brothers into slavery.

Joseph: Picture of Betrayal and Redemption

The majority of the sons of Israel (ten) rejected Joseph and sold him into slavery. Centuries later one of his descendants, Jesus, was rejected by most of Israel and hung on a cross. But both rose to vindication by God's sovereign power and became the source of redemption for the very ones who betrayed them. That's why one ancient view of Messiah was that he would be a suffering Messiah like Joseph. Like Joseph's brothers, the Pharisees represent the jealous brothers of Jesus' time.

In the case of Joseph, he was elevated because of God-given gifts to the second highest place in the kingdom of Pharaoh. He literally went from prison to a palace. He was in charge of the granaries of Egypt when his brothers came to Egypt for help because of famine. Though they did not recognize him at first, he helped them and then revealed his true identity to them. This is a double picture of grace. Jesus helped both unbelieving Gentiles (as Joseph helped the Egyptians) and his Jewish brethren who would accept him. At the end of this story, Joseph comforted his brothers by saying "*what you intended to me for evil God has used for great good... to accomplish what is now being done, the saving*

of many lives.” (Gen. 50:20) Joseph demonstrated great grace in forgiving his brothers.

Likewise, the death of Christ on the cross was intended to harm him, but resulted in the salvation of believers throughout the world. Jesus demonstrated God’s grace by dying for the sins of all mankind. Through his resurrection he became “the firstborn among many brothers”.⁷ Likewise, Jesus will ultimately redeem His brothers “*in the flesh*”. Rom 9:3-5 KJV

Exodus 1:6-14

Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

Related Reading- Exodus 1-12

⁷ Romans 8:29

God Works Through a Flawed Nation and Its Leaders

The end of Genesis sets up the story of Exodus. Only now, four generations have passed. The pharaoh that knew and honored Joseph had passed from the scene. The pharaohs now were suspicious of foreigners. Israel had grown from a tribe of 70 to a nation of two million people in the generations after Joseph, some 300 years. (This is well within average population growth statistics.) During that time the Egyptians had also enslaved them for their public works projects, such as the building of cities and tombs. (The great pyramids were already standing.)

Because the “foreign” population was multiplying, Pharaoh decreed that all male Hebrew babies should be destroyed at birth. The Hebrew midwives at first refused to heed this. Moses’ mother put him in a reed basket and floated him out on the Nile to protect him from certain death, hoping that God would intervene. He did and Pharaoh’s daughter found the baby and adopted him.

Thus, Moses was raised in the palace of Egypt, receiving all the education of the most advanced culture of that day. *Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.⁸* But when he reached forty, he identified more closely with his Hebrew brethren who were in bondage. *“By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”⁹* Thus the New Testament book of Hebrews describes the great Deliverer. And thus the New Testament records oral tradition that had long been passed down among the Jews, though not stated in the Old Testament.

⁸ Acts 7:22

⁹ Hebrews 11:24,25

As a result of intervening and killing a slave master, he had to flee Egypt for his life. He went across the desert to Midian, near the Gulf of Aqaba. There he found a distant relative called Jethro and married one of his daughters. Moses lived in relative peace for forty years before God summoned him.

Moses was tending the sheep near the Mountain of Sinai when he saw fire and smoke up on the mountain and went to investigate. There he found a burning bush, burning but not being consumed by the fire. Out of the fire came the voice of God.

“Moses, Moses.”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”¹⁰

So in this exchange God reveals what has often been called his covenant name. In Hebrew it was Yahweh (YHWH). In English Bibles, it is always indicated by the all capital form of LORD.

Not only had the sons of Israel multiplied physically in Egypt, but they had also been pulled into the culture to some extent. So, in the Exodus, God had two tasks: to deliver them from Egypt and to get Egypt out of them!

Those two objectives comprise the main themes of Exodus. Getting them out of Egypt includes Moses' early life and preparation to be the Deliverer, the burning bush, plagues and parting of Red Sea (Chapters 1-15).

¹⁰ Exodus 3:4-14

Then comes the Sanctification, ridding them of idolatry and rebellion; provision of new food and drink, commandments and worship—how to relate to a holy God. They would need a form of worship and a place to worship and that was given in detail in the later chapters of Exodus (16-40). Instructions were given for a special tent called the tabernacle. God would not be represented by images of any kind, nor would his name be taken in vain. However, he would meet with the Israelites at the sacred tent and the mercy seat in the holy of holies would be his footstool on the earth.

The Red Sea: A Defining Moment

Moses appears back in Pharaoh's court, demanding that the people of Israel be set free to go into the wilderness to worship. Pharaoh refuses and God sends ten plagues on the nation, always exempting the Israelites. Finally, the tenth plague arrives. The Israelite families are told to put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of each home while the death angel destroys the first born of Egypt, passing over the homes of the Israelites. This is the first Passover. Finally, at this tenth plague, the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt, Pharaoh relents and lets Israel go. The next morning the Israelites begin their migration out of Egypt toward the Red Sea. They leave in haste taking what they can with them. Moses is leading them back to the mountain where God had appeared to him. God sends a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night to lead them along his path. In a few days they arrive at the Red Sea. But in a short time, Pharaoh decides to send his army after them, including 600 of his best chariots (along with the other chariots of Egypt). So this is more than just 600 chariots against 600,000 men.



As the Israelites exit Egypt, the nation of former slaves is caught between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. This is a moment of crisis for Moses as the people begin to panic. Will the God who revealed himself in the Burning Bush and sent the ten plagues continue to deliver them?

How many times have God's people found themselves in similar impossible situations? Perhaps all of us have a crisis of faith at one time or another. The voice of God is the only way out.

At this point Moses speaks in faith. "*Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.*"¹¹

Then God said to him, "*Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.*"¹² Moses obeyed.

A pillar of fire separated God's people from Pharaoh's army; the waters parted into walls of water on their right and on their left; and all night they crossed through the sea on dry land. We are not told how wide this path was, but it must have been a great width to allow the hundreds of thousands of Israelites to cross over in one night. Pictures of a few people abreast crossing through a narrow path do not do this justice. Perhaps the path was half a mile wide or the width of the encampment. Nor is it necessary to imagine that Moses had to be loud enough to be heard by the entire camp. He could have been meeting with a few hundred tribal leaders to assess the situation and give them instructions.

At any rate, the people cross successfully. When the pillar of fire moves, Pharaoh's chariots move into the path behind them.

¹¹ Exodus 14:13,14

¹² Exodus 14:15

At this point, the waters close and the Egyptians are drowned. Ironically, the Egyptians who had ordered the drowning of many Hebrew children just eighty years later, now paid with their own lives.

However you look at it, this is a miracle that cannot be explained by natural causes. The timing for Israel's safe crossing and Egypt's disaster is too precise. The walls of water on either side are very specific. The dry path is also supernatural. The same God who created has now delivered.

Commandments for Today: Structure for Life

American culture today is mixed, but much of it is more like Egypt than Israel. We have, in our way turned back to old idolatries. Where God said we should have no other gods, we have sometimes elevated financial success, sports figures, politicians and entertainers to godlike status. Others have elevated scientists and academics to that status. Sports and entertainment palaces have become the new temples for some. In the midst of this, Christians try to keep their heads and worship the one true God.

You are God alone, from before time began,
You were on your throne, you were God alone.
And right now, in the good times and bad,
You are on your throne, you are God alone.¹³

The next commandments had to do with graven images and keeping God's name holy. Today, the names of God and Jesus are taken in vain and blasphemed regularly. This kind of profanity has reached an all time high. It has always been there to some extent and is evidence of man's rebellion. But today, making the sacred common, and treating Jesus like dirt have become epidemic. The Jews gradually improved their service to God over the years and made many efforts to keep God's name holy. They wouldn't even

¹³ "You Are God Alone", Billy and Cindy Foote

pronounce the sacred name Yahweh and were reluctant to even say God. So they used substitutes like Lord (Adonai), Heaven, and Hashem (the Name) etc.

But today there is a blurring of sacred with secular, polite with profane, educated with degraded speech. Many are bent on tearing everything sacred down. Whether they realize it or not, they are doing the devil's work. When God wanted to build a society among the Hebrews, he had to build them up with concepts of holiness, sanctity and reverence. So God began to reeducate his people who had come out of Egypt. The initial process took forty years in the wilderness. During that time they became very familiar with God's commandments (not just the ten). God also uses wildernesses in our lives to sanctify us, or make us more dependent on him.

Relearning the Ten Commandments today in America just might transform society again. But we have lost the sense of our common deliverance that helps mold societies together. The Revolution and the Civil War were common deliverances experienced by Americans that shaped our character as "one nation under God". James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, said,

"We have staked the whole of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government...to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." The Second World War was more recent and probably the last common deliverance experienced by this nation. The Ten Commandments were still taught in many public schools into the sixties. Since then we

have become fragmented and enamored with multi-culturalism. Just sixty years ago it was no secret that the Anglo-American allies were fighting for the "preservation of Christian civilization" based on the Judeo-Christian world view. Churchill and Roosevelt were clear on this in their speeches. In the 1950's, perhaps in gratitude



to God, the words “one nation under God” were added to our Pledge of Allegiance.

But man’s rebellion came back with a vengeance in the sixties and early seventies. Ostensibly it was a rebellion against war and injustice. But Satan seized the opportunity to extend it to a rebellion against all authority and traditional (Judeo-Christian) morals. “Free love” contradicted God’s commandments against adultery and sex outside of marriage. This was followed by the clamor for abortion to become a right. The Supreme Court went along in 1973.

In the seventies, a holocaust of abortion was unleashed in this country. The killing of the children came back from ancient times (Egypt, Rome and other societies). The God of Truth and life was exchanged for gods of lust and convenience. A woman’s right to privacy and choice was suddenly “discovered” in the Constitution by a handful of judges and advocates. (How was that missed for one hundred and eighty years?) The rights of the unborn to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” were trumped by irresponsible choices of both men and women. Ignored was the truth of Psalm 139:

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*¹⁴

God’s answer to all this was a Jesus Movement, which saved many teens and young adults from the bitter fruits of sin. While traditional churches were suspect by the new youth culture, new waves of witness, worship and spiritual warfare were poured out by God’s Spirit. New groups of churches like Calvary Chapels

¹⁴ Psalm 139:13-16

and Vineyards were formed as a result. These groups had a positive influence on older churches. Once again, people found Structure for Life. Structure, not the absence thereof, is what brings true freedom.

Yet, our increasingly secular society is reaping the results of lack of structure. Priorities, Purpose and Principle are lost in the rush to success and pleasure. But people don't find meaning in success or pleasure alone. While our society has more leisure and choices than ever before, the pathology of our society is greater than ever—more depression, dysfunction, suicide, addiction, and divorce than ever before.

Others overreact to the lack of structure in their lives by joining cults that make them feel part of a family and provide structure. One recent example is the young man from California who joined the Taliban. Ironically, he gave up all freedom because he had no boundaries in his life. His parents had basically said, “anything you do is okay”. In contrast to the false freedom of no boundaries, true discipleship provides structure, not in conformity to a man, but to Jesus and his commands.

The Commandments are all about structure. Jesus reiterated the Ten Commandments and filled them with new meaning. He also added a few commandments about life together, giving and practical Christian living. He said that his yoke (teaching) was easy and his burden light.¹⁵ Compared to the six hundred laws of the Pharisees, Jesus' few dozen are simple and light. But they do get to the heart of what constitutes abundant life!

In contrast, our society has convinced itself that they need only two or three maxims to guide their lives: be tolerant of everyone, don't judge anyone (didn't Jesus say that?), and love everyone. The corollary to this is that there is no accountability for moral behavior. This falls far short of true abundant life. Greed

¹⁵ Matt. 11:30

and lust are killing our culture today, from corporations to families. But even the Ten Commandments alone would restore structure and clarify a lot of dilemmas: worship the one true God only; don't make images or take his name in vain; honor your father and mother; do not murder (born or unborn); don't commit adultery—stay with marriage that is one man and one woman; don't give false testimony against your neighbor (in other words stand for truth); don't steal or covet what belongs to others. Coveting has become disguised as other things and ruins families and companies. Coveting leads to debt and servitude. Even some churches fall into the trap of coveting those who are larger.¹⁶

Jesus summarized the commandments as loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself, but they were not his only commands. He also commanded that we worship, pray, share the good news that He is the way, truth and life, make disciples, baptize and teach. We are to celebrate his Supper in remembrance of him; help the poor and widows, sick and afflicted, and the imprisoned.

Christians have generally been doing these charitable things and thus finding true meaning in life for centuries. Christians are the first to build hospitals, orphanages, visit prisons, free slaves and generally raise the standard of living wherever they are free to work in a society. Societies that do not follow Christ are generally destitute of these humanitarian institutions to this day. The hospitals in India did not come from Hindus. Nor did they originate from Muslims in Muslim countries. Nor do we see democracy in these countries. (We should not confuse elections with full blown democratic freedoms such as religion, speech, and press.)

The Sabbath, or day of rest, was commanded for Israel. In the New Testament Jesus said he is “Lord of the Sabbath”. The early church felt liberty to worship (Sabbath) on the first day of the week. The principle of rest and worship is fundamental to the structure of our lives! We were created to observe a day unto God!

¹⁶ The commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-17



Exodus 12:31-39

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go and worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave their country. “For otherwise” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. With the dough they had brought from Egypt, they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

Exodus 15:1-8

*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
I will sing unto the LORD, for he is highly exalted.*

*The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.*

He is my God and I will praise him, my father's God and I will exalt him.

*The LORD is a warrior, the LORD is his name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.*

*Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power.
Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.
In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you.*

*You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.
By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up.
The surging waters stood firm like a wall;
The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.*

Related Reading- Exodus 13-40

Chapter Four

The Exodus to Worship: A Nation is Born

The Exodus path to worship prefigures a development in the lives of believers after their initial deliverance (salvation). Before salvation, all life is secular for most people. After salvation, God teaches us the basics of holiness, reverence and worship. We learn that God's name is holy and that there are designated holy places (at least while God's people are gathered there). That is not to say that all holy places are constructed according to the same pattern today, as once was the case with the tabernacle. Worship centers can be shaped like crosses (as in cathedrals) fan shaped, or warehouses. But what happens in worship is according to a timeless pattern. That pattern exists in heaven and was revealed to Moses in the form of the tabernacle (Hebrews 8:1-5).

We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man... [Earthly priests] serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

It is heartening to read the details of the people leaving in haste, the unleavened bread, their flocks and herds, and even the "mixed multitude" of non-Israelites who must have been attracted to the One True God. It is also heartening to see them singing Moses' song of victory. Interestingly, there are several details about the crossing of the Red Sea that are definitely spelled out. This was no crossing of some shallow area. The chariots going down to the depths is made very clear. The walls of water piled up is very clear. This may have been the first worship song of Israel!

The Tabernacle

“Before you start on the Tabernacle section, I want you to know that our tickets for Israel arrived today. In a couple weeks we’ll be in the land of the Patriarchs and the Israelites,” said Esther with excitement. Matt had been to the Holy Land before, but this would be Esther’s first time.

“I can’t wait either, Honey. I’ve been looking forward to seeing you experience your heritage in a new way,” replied Matt. While they wouldn’t see a tabernacle or a temple there, Matt looked forward to seeing those things depicted in a place called the Temple Institute, just a few yards from the Wailing Wall. Now, back to his story.

The outer court had a door of curtains, an altar of sacrifice and a laver for cleansing. An Israelite had to come through the door, be cleansed and offer sacrifice. Today, the door is Jesus, the cross was the sacrifice and the laver represents forgiveness and baptism.

The Holy Place represented the next level of intimacy with God. But in the Old Covenant it was restricted to priests. It held three articles of furniture made of gold—a lampstand with seven branches, a table for bread and a small altar for incense. The lampstand contained the lights that illuminated the worship and also represented the word of God and Jesus the living word. In addition, the lampstand can represent the Holy Spirit.

The gold and silver used in the tabernacle was given to Israel by the Egyptians as an incentive to leave, and indirectly, as a reparation for the years of servitude.



The table for bread also has a triune significance. The bread can represent the body of Christ, God's provision of sustenance and the word of God, which is also the sword of the Spirit. The incense represents prayer to God, in the name of Jesus and through the Holy Spirit's help.

The Holy of Holies is protected by a curtain or veil. Inside is the Ark of the Covenant—God's footstool on earth. It is also made of wood overlaid by gold, with a lid made of pure gold. The lid had two cherubim figures perched on it, also made of pure gold. Once a year the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the lid of the Ark (called the mercy seat) by the High Priest. The book of Hebrews explains that Christ entered the Holy of Holies in heaven once for all, taking his own blood in our behalf. When he died at the completion of his own body being torn, the veil in the temple of his day was also torn—opening the way for us to the very presence of God.

These are ever present realities (or possibilities) in Christian worship, not necessarily in one given order. Communion, prayer, the offering of sacrifices of praise, the illumination of God's Word and the very presence of God's glory are all a part. What believers would not want to share regularly in this? Perhaps those who are ignorant or untaught? Perhaps they were delivered, spiritually speaking, into the outer court when they were saved: they saw Christ on the cross as their sacrifice and maybe were even baptized, but weren't taught the importance of worship. But we are not born again to just stay in the outer court and watch others go in and commune. Just after Jesus taught on being born again (Jn. 3:5), he taught about true worship "*in Spirit and in truth.*" (Jn. 4:24) Where have you been spending your life, in the outer courts or in the holy places? Today we have the privilege and "*confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body...*" Hebrews 10:19, 20.

Even the Ark had triune elements—gopher wood covered in gold, signifying Christ’s human and divine natures. It contained Moses’ tablets, manna (body of Christ) and Aaron’s rod that budded (Holy Spirit). And the ark in the Holy Place was the focal point for the *shekinah* glory, the manifest presence of God.

A Restored Tabernacle

As I write this, I am sitting in the foyer of a church watching thirty dancers, including my wife, prepare a night of extravagant worship that clearly illustrates many elements of worship. I can tell you that even though they are not fully costumed and are only practicing to a CD, that the glory of God is already here. When the musicians and worshipers assemble this evening, the sense of God’s presence will be multiplied by as many people who come. These dancers and musicians are the modern day Levites who usher us in to God’s presence. The Levites were the people responsible for the priesthood and the worship in the tabernacle and later the temple.

But today we are all part of a royal priesthood to offer sacrifices of praise in our various ways.¹⁷ Some may sing, some may dance, some may play, and some may declare. In this particular worship service a replica of the Ark will be carried in by men in white priestly garments to remind us of some these principles.

While worship for many centuries had become ritualistic in many churches, there has been a resurgence of the worship of the Psalms in recent years. Many believers see this as a fulfillment of a verse in Acts 15.

Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁷ I Peter 2:9

*After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.
It's ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the remnant of
men will seek my face.*¹⁸

While the point in question had to do with the Gentiles being saved, a secondary point is made: that in some sense there will be a restoration of the fallen tent (tabernacle) of David. Now, it is unlikely that this prophecy is referring to an actual tent. But the restoration of fully expressed, biblical worship has been taking place in the last thirty years. There has been a renewal of Scripture songs and Psalms (half of which were written by David). Secondly, there has been a return to expressive worship and renewal of arts in worship. As opposed to standing and singing hymns, there are now many more expressions of praise: through Davidic postures, raising of hands, banners, dance, etc. And thirdly, there has been a new fulfillment of Psalm 150, which exhorts us to use all kinds of instruments in praise. Only twenty years ago, a praise “band” was considered controversial.¹⁹ Psalm 150 also mentions dance, and that has been reintroduced to worship in the last ten to fifteen years. It is still unheard of in many places.

Structure for the Week

God commanded strict observance of the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath. Dedicating a day each week to rest and religious activity is part of God’s plan for man’s wholeness. The command was to work six days and rest the seventh. In a high stress world, this makes even more sense. Technically, the Sabbath extended from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Most Christians still believe in the Sabbath principle, but celebrate it on Sunday, since Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the

¹⁸ Acts 15:14-17

¹⁹I know because I was the first one to introduce one in my church.

week. However, the flurry of worldly and sports activities continues to encroach on the Sabbath ideal.

What we may miss from the narrative of Exodus, although it is more clear in Deuteronomy, is that God's commands extend from his character, which is described as: "*merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.*" Exodus 34:6,7.

Verse fourteen adds that he is a jealous God—*el kana*. We might paraphrase this to mean that "because I Am who I Am, I give you commands that will protect our relationship and make you successful." This could be compared to a spouse setting boundaries to protect a marriage, or a father setting boundaries to protect the family unit. In both cases, the one setting the boundaries knows that the relationship is primary and ultimately the most lasting and important, compared to all others. It is in this context that the other commands and instructions from God make more sense. One translation puts it, "God is jealous because he is passionate about his relationship with you."

Structure for the Year: Seven Feasts

Esther looked over Burn's shoulder to read what he had just written. "Yes, and I'm passionate about our relationship! By the way, are you going to talk about the feasts? I love how God uses them to teach us his plan of salvation and how Jesus fulfilled them."

Burns grinned as she kissed him on the cheek. "I was just thinking about that. We've certainly learned a lot about them at our congregation."

"And Jesus already fulfilled the first four, didn't he."

Moses records in Leviticus 23 the seven feasts of the Lord that ordered the year for the covenant people.

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.”²⁰

They are grouped in three seasons of the year. We might call them appointments with God. The spring begins with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, including Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Then, seven weeks following the early harvest came the feast of Pentecost. Finally, the fall feasts came four months later: Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles.

At these three times a year the people, especially the men, were to appear before the Lord at a central location. Initially that was wherever the tabernacle was pitched. During the period of the Judges that was at Shiloh. Later, David brought the Ark and tabernacle to Jerusalem. That is where Solomon built the temple.

Matt jotted down the seven feasts and their original purpose:

Passover-remembering their deliverance from Egypt.

Unleavened Bread- Getting rid of the leaven of sin.

Firstfruits- Recognize the Lord’s blessing and bounty in the land.

Pentecost- Joy and thankfulness for the early harvest and the giving of the covenant at Sinai.

Trumpets- Season of repentance and awe

²⁰ Leviticus 23: 1,2

Day of Atonement- Yearly sacrifice to roll back the sins of the nation and the priests.

Tabernacles- Memorial of the wilderness journey and thanks for the harvest.

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Today we might call these feast periods conferences, conventions, or camp meetings. These were opportunities to leave home, and join the holy nation for a week or two as often as three times a year. It was a type of vacation, only instead of RV's they packed up their tents and headed to the designated place, God's holy city Jerusalem. How sad and incomplete for God's people that this has been reduced to a couple holy days a year. It is Easter and Christmas for many new covenant believers. These are certainly significant events of the Lord's incarnation and passion that are worth celebrating. But what if believers today were to add meaning to their lives by celebrating Pentecost and a fall feast? These would be added reminders of spiritual growth. Thanksgiving has replaced the fall feasts for some. But for that reason, we have lost the prophetic significance of the fall feasts.

Fulfillments that can be celebrated today fall into the three seasons. Passover/Easter celebrate Christ's fulfillment of the first three feasts. Pentecost originally commemorated the giving of the

Law from Mount Sinai, and the Mosaic Covenant. It now celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, the first harvest of Christians and the birth of the church on Pentecost right after Jesus' death and resurrection. The fall feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles look forward to the return of Christ and his reign.

Trumpets – Final warnings as in the book of Revelations

Atonement – Final revival among the Jews receiving Messiah (Zech 12:10)

Tabernacles – Dwelling of God and The Messiah among men

Those who participate in special Easter and Christmas events often spend weeks preparing for pageants and find a richness in that structure, much like the Levites of old: for we are a “*royal priesthood and a chosen generation*”. (I Peter 2:9) Matt and Ester had also participated in “Christ in the Passover” events.

Paul made it clear that such days don't have to be observed,²¹ but such focal points help us stay focused on eternal realities instead of getting lost in a worldly culture. The world has many substitutes that serve as secular holidays: a secularized Christmas, Mardi Gras, Fourth of July and Halloween. For too many people these are merely reasons for parties and drinking. However, this shows that man has an inborn need for structure throughout his year to give his life meaning. The Fourth of July, of course, can be observed as a time for God and country.

While a few of Moses' laws were similar to codes of the time like Hammurabi's, there were several unique things about God's laws. Regarding the rest of the Levitical laws:

Some of them may seem severe to us, but if we could transport ourselves back to Moses' world, they probably would not

²¹ Colossians 2:16, 17

*seem severe enough. On the whole, Moses' law, in its insistence on Personal Morality, and Personal Equality, and its consideration for the Old and Young, for Slave and for Enemy, for Animals and its health and food regulations, was far purer, more rational, humane and Democratic than anything in ancient legislation. It is the moral miracle of the pre-Christian world.*²²

Summary of Leviticus

One Bible teacher summarized Leviticus as Priests and Feasts. Certainly God's spiritual leaders need laws and organization. The New Testament provides some of this in exhortations to elders, deacons and pastors, while reminding us that we are a priesthood of all believers.

But under the Old Covenant God needed leaders who would attend to sacrifices, feasts and all the religious teaching of the nation. The priests did their duty both in their home towns, and two weeks a year at the temple. There were also Levites who spent all their time attending to duties at the temple, and also providing praise music for the worshipers. “*One clan of the Levites, the family of Aaron, was set apart to be priests. The rest of the Levites were to be assistants to the priests. Their duties were the care of the tabernacle, and later the temple, and to be teachers, scribes, musicians, officers and judges.*”²³

The priests even made judgments about when people were ritually cleansed, or healed of diseases. They took care of the temple treasury, including aid to the poor. They were to remind the people to put God first in life.

²² Halley's Bible Handbook, Zondervan; Grand Rapids, pg. 138 (24th edition).

²³ Halley's Handbook, pg. 156.

Numbers: Forty Years of Wandering

The Lord, through Moses, began organizing the men of Israel into an army after they left Egypt. The men of fighting age (20 and above) were numbered from each tribe and the total was about 600,000. However there were rebellions and punishments. Finally, the Lord determined that no one over the age of twenty would be part of those who would enter the promised land, and that generation died in the wilderness. What potential was lost through their rebellion! A journey that might have taken a few months and resulted in their occupying the Promised Land was extended 40 years to the next generation. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, no one older than sixty entered the promise land.

For centuries to come God would use their example as a warning against unbelief. The turning point comes in chapter thirteen when Moses sends twelve spies into the Promised Land. They return with glowing reports about the land, but ten of them are convinced that they cannot defeat the people of the land. Only Joshua and Caleb speak words of faith. But alas, it is not enough to convince the majority. After all the miracles the people had experienced, they still showed contempt for the Lord instead of gratitude and wonder.

Despite the sometimes ungrateful people, God continued to do miracles of provision and preservation. Later it is said that their clothing did not rot, nor did their shoes wear out while they were in the wilderness. They lived off manna, quail, and their flocks and herds during these journeys. As far as we know, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night continued with them through this period. The book is a testimony to God's faithfulness to sometimes unfaithful people. In the New Testament this is called grace.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country

The fruit of your womb will be blessed and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

*Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.
You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.*

The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.

The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you

pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

Related Reading- Deuteronomy 1-27, Joshua 1-6

Chapter Five

What About the Rest of the Torah?

Moses wrote the rest of God's instructions during Israel's forty years of wandering (Numbers). And Deuteronomy is actually a restating of the law in the form of Moses' last sermons to the people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy, which means "second law", the law is summarized. The message of these books is that obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings rebuke and bondage.

The last prophecy of Deuteronomy is like history in advance. Especially in chapter thirty, Moses predicts the dispersion, repentance, restoration and future national restoration of Israel in the end times. Moses also predicts the coming of the Messiah in chapter eighteen when he tells them to look for the "prophet like me" that will someday come. In an even greater way than Moses, Jesus would deliver people from bondage to sin and bring a new covenant.

The book of Deuteronomy must have been a favorite of Jesus because he quoted from it more than any other book of the Old Testament. He also alluded to all the characters of Genesis and the Torah as real historical people. The oneness and love of God are emphasized in the early chapters.

After repeating the Ten Commandments in chapter five, chapter six contains the Shema, the most basic statement of faith of the Jewish people.

Hear (Shema), O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you

*walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*²⁴

The next chapter states that God's covenant (relationship) with Israel is a covenant of love.

*Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.*²⁵

This is followed by promises for those who obey, and warnings for those who don't. In response to obedience, the LORD also promises to keep them free from every disease.

Secular Man: "But wasn't the Torah written a few centuries B.C. by some scribes, sort of as a collection of folklore?"

This is a common belief among liberals. Liberal theologians in the 1800's began undermining the authority and authenticity of the Torah (Pentateuch) through *form criticism*. This involved reading things into the text and drawing conclusions based on faulty presuppositions. German theologians placed the Torah a thousand years after it was written purely on the basis of the Documentary Hypothesis. This theory said that later editors used different names for God and different terminology. This was aptly refuted by Bible scholars, both Jewish and Christian, but remained popular through the twentieth century.²⁶ The theory gained ground among liberal critics who thought it beneath them to accept the Bible as written.

Human reasoning was made the final criterion about what should be believed. But it is logically inconsistent for finite man to

²⁴ Deut. 6:4-9

²⁵ Deut. 7:9

²⁶ For a full refutation of this hypothesis, see *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell, Section II, Thomas Nelson, pgs. 389-530.

make himself the final arbiter of what an infinite God can do. Attacks on the Old Testament were followed within a few decades by attacks on the Gospels and the New Testament. The so-called “search for the historical Jesus” began. Not surprisingly they concluded that the “real” Jesus was just a man. Once again, their theories were based on flimsy ideas and anti-supernatural bias.

By late-dating the Old Testament books, the form critics (a school of “higher criticism”) eliminated much predictive prophecy that was part of the attestation of the prophets. They also showed a great misunderstanding about the reverence and role of scribes who believed from the very beginning that they were handling the word of God.

Matt was prepared the next time he ran into Jim at the campus coffee shop. “Hi, Jim, what have you been up to?”

“Well, Burns, pretty much the same stuff. What are you working on lately?”

“Oh, I’m still working on my Old Testament project.” Jim said, “Seems like I recall from an English Bible Literature class that most of the Old Testament was written a thousand years after some people said. Didn’t they make some discoveries about that?

“Well,” Burns replied, “there were really no discoveries. Just nineteenth century theologians and philosophers putting their evolutionary spin on the Bible. They never had any evidence. What you’re referring to is the Documentary Hypothesis. You know, a hypothesis is something that might be true, based on presuppositions and observed patterns. But people who start with presuppositions often find only what they’re looking for. This was just a literary theory that was sort of made up and caught fire. People in those



days assumed Moses could not have written the first five books in 1400 B.C. because they didn't think anyone could write at that time. That assumption has been proven wrong many times over, but the hypothesis still exists.

“Some scholars assumed that because there are different divine names, like Yahweh and Elohim, that sections were written by different authors or editors and pasted together later. Sometimes when I write I say Jesus, and sometimes I say Christ. You could look at my work and assume that two different people wrote it. Or you could consider that I might have a reason for the times that I use Jesus, meaning salvation, and the times I use Christ, meaning Messiah. There are similar reasons for using various names in the Torah. If you make the wrong assumption, you will misconstrue the writing and miss the whole point!”

“But why did the theory become so popular?” asked Jim.

“Why do you think the Kennedy Conspiracy theory has been so popular? Sometimes people are predisposed to believe something. They tend to mistrust authority. So if the Warren Commission concludes that one assassin acted alone, no one wants to believe it. No one has ever proven a conspiracy, yet the theory persists. Once these things get started...”

“Does it really make any difference?” asked Jim.

“Some things don't. But the consequences of tearing down the inspiration of the Bible are very serious. This hypothesis has helped to destroy the faith of many Bible students in seminaries and colleges. New theories are often fashionable because they are novel and unorthodox and more interesting than the orthodox truth. But this one gave many people one more reason to doubt Scripture and doubt God, the one who is trying to save us.”

“Well, you know I question that salvation stuff. Man has to save himself,” Jim said dismissively.

“You know, Jim, that was a popular idea back at the beginning of the twentieth century. Philosophers thought we were making progress and no longer considered the role of human depravity. That optimism pretty much went out the window with communism, fascism, Nazism and war after war. Do you really believe man can save himself? I think that takes more faith than believing in God. Man always messes things up.”

That was the end of that conversation, but Matt was already moving ahead toward the next objection to the Bible’s account of the Exodus.

Burns heard the next objection loudly in his head. Secular Man: But isn’t it hard to believe that all those people could survive in the desert for forty years?

Logistics in the Desert

Yes, this is a valid question. It is mind-boggling to imagine how two to three million people could migrate across a desert for forty years. Skeptics have discounted this as a fabrication. Yet, there are factors to be accounted for. The Bible does not pretend that this happened without divine intervention and supernatural provision. In fact, the provision of manna six days a week is recorded in great detail. We should also remember that they took flocks and herds with them.

Climatologists have told us that the deserts in the Middle East have been growing for the last three thousand years. These areas were once less arid and did have more vegetation. God also provided ample water on more than one occasion for the Israelites. God’s provision also extended to their clothing and shoes not wearing out. One reason that they wandered was to find new areas of provision and grazing when necessary. It is not as though they camped at Mount Sinai for the whole forty years. Besides, the

traditional Mount Sinai may not be the same one that they camped around.

There is archaeological evidence at two other mountains for the ancient encampment of the Israelites. One is a mountain close to Midian at the northeast corner of the Sinai peninsula. The other is farther south in Arabia and very hard to access because it is closed to outsiders by the Saudi government.

Secular Man: “You don’t really believe that Red Sea story do you?”

This question takes us back to the nature and definition of God. The God who created the world, caused a world-wide flood and did many other supernatural things can intervene in nature whenever he chooses. By creating dry land in the midst of a sea, he revealed his supreme power. By closing this path and drowning the pursuing Egyptian army, he also judged the nation that had kept the Israelites enslaved for a couple hundred years.

There is actually an undersea ridge across the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba adjacent to the Sinai peninsula where this could have happened. There is even evidence of petrified chariot wheels at this site. There is also a tradition of a crossing at the Sea of Reeds on the west side of Sinai that is strong. At any rate, it took a miracle to first get the children of Israel across, and then drown the Egyptian army in the same body of water. This was no wading area!

It is hard to explain what other process could have led to the founding of a new nation in Canaan about 1400 B.C. Though they sometimes acted like independent tribes, their nation was fully formed, with religious and civil laws and heritage, when they entered the land.

Divine Names in the Torah

For years, Matt had heard about different forms of God's name in Hebrew. It was confusing until he learned that each name revealed something about God's character.

Throughout the Torah, God revealed himself through various names. We have already discussed Elohim and Yahweh, but several other names or titles, are given. In Genesis 14:12, God is called El Elyon, God most high. In Genesis 17:1 He is called El Shaddai, or God almighty. In Genesis 22:14 He is Yahweh Yireh (also pronounced Jehovah Jireh)²⁷ which means the God who provides.

In Exodus 15:26 He is called Yahweh Rophe, the God who heals. In Exodus 17:15 He is called Yahweh Nissi, the LORD my banner. In Exodus 34:14 He is called El Kana, the jealous God (one who cares passionately for his people).

Later Old Testament passages add a few more names. In Joshua 5:14 He is Yahweh Tsevaioth the LORD of hosts (armies). In Judges 6:24 He reveals himself to Gideon as Yahweh Shalom, the LORD of peace. Peace has been defined as completeness, health, welfare and harmony between God and man.²⁸

To David He revealed himself as Yahweh Rohi, the shepherd in Psalm 23. In the next five hundred years, God revealed himself as Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), and El Gibor (mighty God) in Isaiah 9:6.

When Matt shared this list with Esther she said, "The LORD is my provider is my favorite name for God. He is so good to us."

²⁷ Many Jews prefer Yahweh over Jehovah because there is no j in the Hebrew language.

²⁸ David Wilkerson, *Hallowed Be Thy Names*, David Wilkerson Publications, Lindale, TX, 2001, p. 88.

“Yes, he provided us for each other didn’t he?” answered Matt.

Joshua and the Conquest

The book of Joshua is the first book in the histories of Israel, which cover a thousand years from the conquest of Canaan through the end of Israel’s kingdom period- 400 B.C.

Compared to the wandering in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan is easier to understand. We think of Christ when we read some of the details. The “Commander of the Armies of the Lord” appears to Joshua to help prepare him for leadership. This may very well have been an early appearance of Christ, what is called a pre-incarnate appearance. (Orthodox Christians have always believed that Christ existed with the Father before his birth as a human child.) I Corinthians 10 seems to affirm this since it says, *“they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.”* (v.4)

The first objective for Israel is the conquest of Jericho, so Joshua sends spies to check it out. They are sheltered by a local prostitute named Rahab who lived in the city wall. (The ruins show that homes were often built up against the inside of the wall.) Jericho was the first fortified city that the Israelites would attack, and possibly the greatest stronghold. So in God’s version of shock and awe, they would strike the most powerful city with great force and then clear out other areas. Joshua’s tactics are still studied by the military, but God was really the general.

Even though they were going against a fortified city, 600,000 men of fighting age was no small force. And as soon as they could destroy Jericho, they could begin living off the provisions of the land. But even with large numbers, there were

probably not a lot of weapons. They had, perhaps, gained some from the defeat of the Amalekites shortly after leaving Egypt.

But despite all this, God was ready to do two miracles. First was the crossing of the Jordan River at flood stage. The river literally stopped running and they crossed on dry land. Blame this on an earthquake if you will, but the timing is still a miracle.

The second miracle was the collapse of the walls of Jericho after the Israelites marched around it for seven days.

Though the walls may stand before us, hem us in on every side

*They come crashing down when they hear the sound
of the Name above all others.*

*Yeshua ha mashiah, El Gibor you're the Mighty God
Jehovah Nissi you're my banner, El Shaddai.²⁹*

Even today God's people are inspired at God's power to conquer insurmountable odds and gain victory for his people. His words to Joshua were "*Be Bold, Be Strong, for the Lord your God is with you.*" And these were Joshua's words to the people. There have been all sorts of attempts to explain this event by natural phenomena such as earthquakes, but the timing is still a miracle. It was not until the seventh day and the seventh time around that the walls fell flat! By this time the inhabitants of the land were so filled with fear that they could not fight, besides being totally outnumbered. Without their wall they had no hope.

Imagine what they had experienced in a week's time. At first they saw the Israelites across the Jordan and probably figured they had some time because of the flood stage. Suddenly, the waters dried up and an army was marching straight across toward them. Talk about fear factor! Then the Israelites marched ominously around the city without making noise for seven days. That is psychological warfare. Contrast that with the shout and the

²⁹ El Shaddai, by Ed Kerr and Paul Wilbur. Integrity Music.

walls collapsing. Six hundred thousand soldiers would have easily extended all the way around the city. Forget your mental picture of a single file line around the city. The Israelites probably marched twenty to thirty deep at every point along the wall, assuming the city was an average of a square mile. So when the walls collapsed every man went straight into the city to finish off the defenders.

Even today we often see the miracle of God's timing in our lives if we wait for it. The common mistake of Christians today is to have vision without timing. It is easy to imagine and envision great things for God: to build a building or take a city. But without God's timing such efforts will come to nothing. As the prophet said, "*Unless the Lord builds the house, they that build labor in vain.*" (Ps 127:1)

Thousands of years later Benjamin Franklin recognized the wisdom of this verse in the midst of the Constitutional Convention. At a time of deadlock he quoted the verse and called for prayers to the Almighty to help in the building of a new republic.

At the end of Joshua's life his book was added to the sacred library, probably kept in the Ark of the Covenant.

What About the Violence of the Conquest?

The ancient world was a very cruel place. The societies of Canaan were very degraded at the time of the conquest. God reserves the right to judge unrepentant societies, like he did earlier in the time of the flood. But his judgments are always preceded by warnings. God will at times destroy those who are beyond saving, but only after repeated attempts to get their attention. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had witnessed to these societies centuries earlier. They had seen the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, they were still worshiping idols and sacrificing children in the fires of Molech. There was ritual prostitution associated with pagan

shrines. God decided to cleanse the land and give it to his covenant people, as he had promised Abraham earlier.

Yes, God could have allowed the inhumane practices of these people to continue, and the cumulative effect would have been far worse. Instead, like a doctor trying to save a patient by removing cancer, he determined that it would be better to sacrifice a generation, than to corrupt many future generations. Only God has the authority to administer justice in this way. Innocent children were spared the degradation of growing up without the knowledge of God and would be later spared for eternity rather than growing up to sin and pay the eternal penalty for it. If God's ways seem harsh, remember that a whole generation of Israelites had just died in the wilderness to rid the nation of corrupting influences.

It is far too easy for modern man, who has experienced the benign influence of generations of Christianity, to consider God's ways harsh and second guess his decisions. Why is it that modern man is so quick to justify and condone his sin and condemn God for his justice? We are infected with skepticism and always assume we know what is best, despite the vast evidence to the contrary. Man repeatedly goes his own way with the same disastrous results and wonders why.

We are merciful to those who take the lives of innocent children today, and also merciful to those who commit heinous crimes. If we followed God's commands, we would let the unborn children live and make murderers pay for the taking of innocent life (through the justice system).

In every case the baneful infection of degenerate idolatry and moral depravity had to be removed before Israel could safely settle down in these regions and set up a monotheistic law-governed commonwealth as a testimony for the one true God. Much as we regret the terrible loss of life, we must remember that

*far greater mischief would have resulted if they had been permitted to live on in the midst of the Hebrew nation.*³⁰

The witness of history is that those societies who do not follow the Judeo-Christian moral code are far more cruel and lead to far more deaths. While there are occasional deaths from overly zealous Christians, there were nearly a hundred million deaths from the atheistic regimes of the twentieth century alone.



II Samuel 7: 5-16

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites out off Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’

³⁰ Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, Zondervan Publishing, 1892, pg.158

Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning, and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“ ‘The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will be the one who will build a house for my Name, and will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’ ”

Related Reading- II Samuel 1-8, Judges 1-7, II Chronicles

Chapter Six

The Period of Judges to Kings: Lessons about Leadership

The original center of the nation was located at Shiloh. That is where the Tabernacle was pitched, once the Conquest was completed. The nation was to be a theocracy, with God as king. The twelve tribes were to gather at Shiloh at the appointed seasons for worship. The book of Judges summarizes a three hundred year period when the nation was led by leaders raised up by God called judges.

Originally, the nation was to be led by appointed elders, as established by Moses (and extended by Joshua). This consisted of a total of seventy-two, or approximately five from every tribe. However, the system soon began to break down. The Israelites were tempted and seduced by the Baal worship of the surrounding tribes. Instead of completely ridding their land of the pagan people, they compromised and allowed some to stay. Gradually, the coastal people called the Philistines (originally Phoenicians) began to threaten the security of Israel. The more Israel slid into idolatry, the stronger their enemies became. God allowed these enemies to oppress them as punishment for their idolatry and spiritual adultery.

Every generation or so, the people of God would cry out in repentance, and God would raise up a judge to lead them in defeating their enemies and rallying them back to their true faith. Names like Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Gideon became part of the history of ancient Israel. Jephthah and Samson were added to the list of national heroes as well. The last judge and first prophet was Samuel.

Matt felt like a sardine as their plane approached the coastline of Israel. It was late afternoon and they had been flying twelve hours from Atlanta. They had actually left Atlanta the night before at 10:30 and lost six hours in time zones. In a few minutes they would land at Tel Aviv.

“Are you excited honey?” asked Esther as they strained to look out the window.

“Yes, I feel great. It’s something I’ve looked forward to ever since we got married. I’ve been through here before, but usually more focused on getting to Damascus, or Egypt or some other ancient city. The more I’ve studied the Bible, the more I’ve wanted to come on a trip like this.

They landed at Tel Aviv and found the rest of their tour group. It was exciting to walk out of the airport and see Israeli soil. They got on their bus and had a beautiful view of the central mountains rising in the distance in the late afternoon sun. They would be heading north, though, because the first part of the week would be in Galilee. One of their first sites would be the spring at Harod, in the Jezreel valley

Gideon and the Original 300

Much has been made of the Greek (Spartan) 300 who held off the Persian army at Thermophylae in 480 B.C. But many have forgotten the judge of Israel who accomplished an even greater feat centuries earlier.

Gideon’s spring, the spring of Harod, still exists in northern Israel along the Jezreel Valley. Today it is a beautiful national park and a green oasis in the midst of arid country. A huge Midianite army had invaded Israel and God was looking for a hero to lead his people. He chose an unlikely candidate in Gideon. But Gideon was teachable and listened to God’s directions. As Gideon

calls up the army, God tells him he has too many people. What? When does a general ever think he has too many soldiers? But God's ways are not our ways and He gets the glory.

Israel was oppressed by the Midianites and some Amalekites who would come over from east of the Jordan and destroy the crops and herds of Israel. They seemed as numerous as to be compared with locusts invading the land. Finally God called Gideon to lead the people. After some arguing with God and putting out a fleece to confirm God's plan, he called for troops. About 32,000 answered the call.

But God says "that's too many". So Gideon sends home the fearful and only 10,000 remain. God still says it's too many. So after paring them down even more, Gideon is left with three hundred.³¹ They surrounded and surprised the enemy camp with torches and trumpets. When the trumpets sounded and torches appeared from beneath pitchers, the men also gave a great shout. This sent the enemy into panic and mayhem. Gideon continued to judge Israel for several years.

Gideon is followed by other judges like Samson. The Judges cycle was one of apostasy, oppression, repentance and deliverance. The lesson of Judges is that incomplete obedience leads to oppression. This holds true in our personal lives as well as for churches and nations. Human nature being what it is, things have to get bad before man will repent and call out to God. The last, and perhaps the greatest, judge was Samuel.

Just prior to Samuel was a judge named Eli who was corrupt. While he had some good qualities, he allowed his sons to lead the nation astray. During his rule, the Ark of God was taken into battle as a "good luck charm" and captured by the Philistines. This was a low point. Eli did a "Humpty Dumpty" when he heard of the capture of the Ark. He fell off his chair and broke his neck. Later, the Philistines sent the Ark back, because illness had struck

³¹ Judges 7:7

whatever city they kept it in. While it was no laughing matter to the Philistines, it is humorous to consider.

Samuel was a true judge, military leader and spiritual leader. But by this time the people began to clamor for a king like the nations around them. Samuel took this personally, despite God's message that, "It is not you they are rejecting, but me." The strong pull toward a human leader seems to be part of man's instinct and downfall. Samuel warns the people that a king will tax them severely and conscript them for the military. They don't heed the warning and so Samuel anoints Saul, son of Kish.

Saul has all the attributes of a giant character, tall and handsome, but he had a dwarfed heart. By the end of his reign, he had no heart for God. So what a contrast it was when David came along and was known as a "man after God's heart".

The story of Saul has all the jealousy, military drama and tragedy of a Shakespearian play. David is anointed by Samuel as a youth to be the next king. But he is still just a shepherd boy until he confronts the giant Goliath. After confronting and defeating the Philistine giant, David is brought to Saul's court as armor bearer and musician. David is summoned to soothe the aging Saul through music. An evil spirit comes upon Saul and he tries to kill the future king. (Satan always tries to cut off God's plan.) David, with the help of Saul's son Jonathan, escapes from the king and forms a rebel army of those dissatisfied with Saul. But they do not take the offensive against Saul and David will not strike him, even when the opportunity is laid in his lap at the cave of Ein Gedi.³²

The nobility of David is a striking contrast with the paranoid ego of the aging king. The tragic ending is when Jonathan is killed in battle and Saul falls on his own sword.

War follows for seven years between the house of Saul and the house of David. David is first crowned king of two tribes in

³² I Samuel 24:1-17

Hebron. Seven years later he is crowned king of all Israel. He proceeds to defeat the Philistine enemies and consolidate Israeli power. Then he captures Jerusalem and makes it the capital of the kingdom. The ark is brought to Jerusalem with great celebration around 1,000 B.C. Notably, David dances before the Ark as it is brought into Jerusalem.

David set up an elaborate system of praise and worship with the Levites. He appointed worship leaders and wrote psalms (about half of what we have today). He set aside 288 musicians on a rotation which would be about twelve per week. (Each dozen served two weeks of the year.) Thus, David established the first praise bands! This is all found in I Chronicles 25. There was a similar rotation of priests for two weeks a year at the central sanctuary. This rotation was followed through the time of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

One senses that David's worship was at the same time more active than the sacrificial system of Moses' tabernacle, more vocal in praise and more intimate with God. This is evident from his psalms.

David's Tabernacle

This whole system of worship is sometimes called David's tabernacle (I Chronicles 16:1). While there may have been animal sacrifices presented, there was a new spirit of praise and worship at this time of Israel's history. Moreover, according to Acts 15, there may be a last days fulfillment of this tabernacle (type of praise) before the return of the Lord. Not only has there been a worship movement in the last thirty years, but there is an increasingly Jewish element as more Jews receive their Messiah. This union of Jewish and Gentile worship could also be seen as a rebuilding of the fallen tent of David. Note the lyrics of this song by Messianic worship leaders Paul Wilbur and Lynn DeShazo:

*Halle, hallelujah, O shout for joy
When the fallen tent of David
Has been restored
I'll bring back the captives of my people
My people Israel
They shall build the broken walls and cities
And live in them
I will call my people from the nations
I'll plant them in their land
They shall grow and flourish like a vineyard
Not be moved again*

*I will reap a harvest from the nations
I'll bring them by the hand
Jew and Gentile worshiping together
As one new man
Strike the harp and play upon the trimble
O children dance and sing
Shout for joy, worship Him forever
Messiah King, O, Messiah King!*³³

David so much wanted to build a permanent temple for the Lord. But God said it would fall to his son, Solomon to do so. David had been too much a man of warfare. So David amassed much wealth and set it aside for the building of the temple.

After making these plans and authorizing his son to do this great project, David prayed one of the greatest prayers in the Bible:

*Praise be to you O LORD
God of our father Israel
From everlasting to everlasting
Yours, O LORD (Yahweh) is the greatness and the power
And the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
For everything in heaven and earth is yours
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom*

³³ O Shout for Joy, by Lynn DeShazo and Paul Wilbur. Integrity Music.

*You are exalted as head over all.
Wealth and honor come from you.
You are the ruler of all things.³⁴*

David goes on in this prayer to bless his son, the temple to be built, and to bless Israel. Truly this is a high point of the Old Testament period. Together with the dedication of the temple in II Chronicles 6, we see a taste of heaven in the presence of the manifest glory of God coming into these houses of worship.

Later, some of these words must have been the inspiration for the ending of the Lord's prayer!

Solomon's Golden Age

While Solomon went on the build the magnificent temple and a great palace, he only stayed true to the Lord for half of his reign. He became the wisest and greatest king ever to rule up to that time in history, and the borders of Israel were extended to the maximum. Many nations paid tribute to him. He had a business arrangement with King Hiram of Tyre to obtain materials for the temple, particularly the cedars of Lebanon. The dedication of his temple seven years later was the high water mark of his reign. First he prayed to the Lord;

*Now arise, O LORD God and come to your resting place,
You and the ark of your might
May your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation
May your saints rejoice in your goodness
O LORD God, do not reject your anointed one.
Remember your great love promised to David your
servant.³⁵*

³⁴ I Chron. 29:10-13

³⁵ II Chron. 6:41, See Psalm 132

Then the glory of the Lord filled the temple to the extent that the priests could not go in. Fire fell from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices. All the Israelites knelt on the pavement and worshiped the Lord and gave thanks saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.” Thousands of cattle and sheep were sacrificed during the dedication. The priests and Levites blew trumpets. The celebration lasted for two weeks.

Then God made a prophetic promise to Solomon. He said that whenever the people sinned, that “if my people which are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.”³⁶

Then the Lord warned that if Solomon or the people turned away from the true God to worship idols, then the temple would ultimately be destroyed and become a byword and object of ridicule among the nations.

The chronicle goes on to recount the splendor of Solomon’s kingdom and wealth. Yet, in the latter part of his reign he began to marry foreign wives and adopt their gods into the worship of Israel (I Kings 11). Thus, the most powerful king sowed the seeds of destruction of his kingdom. What a commentary on human nature that we so easily forget the source of our success and become unfaithful or lax in our service to God.

The temple of Solomon was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was larger than many other temples of the time. It was twice the size of the tabernacle. It had approximately 2 ½ billion dollars worth of gold in its structure and furnishings. Many pieces were added to the tabernacle furniture (ark, altar of incense and table of showbread). Instead of one laver for washing, Solomon had ten vats of water, each holding 250 gallons of water. In addition, he had a large bronze laver, called a sea, measuring fifteen feet across and seven ½ feet high, which sat on the backs of

³⁶ II Chron. 7:14

twelve full-sized oxen. To the original table of the bread of the presence were added ten tables. To the original seven branched lampstand were added ten gold lampstands. This kind of wealth made Solomon very famous in the ancient world. But without moral purity, the fame was short lived.

Solomon became half-hearted and disobedient. So it is David's tabernacle that God wants to restore in the last days (Amos 9:11 and Acts 15:16). Thus, in this matter of real estate, the heart matters more to God than location, location. The tabernacle of Moses speaks to us of God's holiness and Christ's sacrifice, that is necessary for us to enter into God's presence. Jesus compared himself to the door. John said he was the "lamb of God to take away the sins of the world". His blood is our cleansing. So it is only through the door, the cleansing (laver) and the sacrifice (altar), that we can enter God's holy place. David's tabernacle symbolizes the intimacy we can experience in God's presence, regardless of the type of building. And the temple symbolizes extravagant worship that is appropriate when possible.

All in all, the three kings, averaging forty years of rule each, comprise the one hundred and twenty years of Israel's Golden Age. After Solomon there was a civil war and the division of the nation into northern and southern kingdoms.

One ancient site that is associated with Solomon is Megiddo in the Jezreel valley. This mound has over twenty layers of civilization going back to before the time of Solomon. But it was also one of his fortified cities mentioned in the Bible. This site, and the tel of Beth Sean, both go back to Solomon's time and before. Both of these sites provided excellent hiking for Matt and Esther.

Palestinian Propaganda

Today one can still visit the temple mount in Jerusalem where Solomon's temple, and those after it, once stood. While we read of the magnificence of Solomon's temple, there is also archaeological evidence surrounding the mount. The overwhelming historical and archaeological evidence is for a nearly continuous presence of a Jewish temple there for a thousand years before Christ. Josephus and other first century historians show the detailed destruction of the later temple at that site.

Despite all this, Palestinians have maintained over the last forty years or so that the Jews never had a temple here. They feel they have to justify the presence of their mosques there as if the Jews did not have the site first. Despite the overwhelming evidence against this, they will stop at nothing to try to dislodge the Jewish state. (Even Muslim writings up until 1950 admit the presence of the Jewish temple on this site.)

Solomon's temple lasted until 586 B.C. when it was destroyed by the Babylonians. It was rebuilt seventy years later under the returning exiles. This Second temple stood until Herod started remodeling it in 16 B.C.

There are countless references in the Old Testament to the temple from the time of the restoration in 516. Zerubbabel's temple³⁷ lacked the grandeur of Solomon's, but nevertheless was the center of Judah's worship for five hundred years.

Then, just before the birth of Christ, Herod did a total remodeling of the second temple and left his unique signature upon it. Though that temple, the one which Christ visited, was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Herodian stones are clearly visible today at the archaeological dig at the south end of the temple mount. Matt and Esther were amazed to see first century steps, and a first

³⁷ Ezra 3:8

century street which had been excavated in recent years, complete with the stones that had been thrown off the top by the Romans. The foundation stones of the temple retaining wall have the unique beveled edges from Herod's day.



First Century Street at Base of Temple Mount
(Excavated since 1970)

The Contribution of Archaeology

Occasionally one hears of doubts about biblical events from the field of archaeology. There has been a running debate about the archaeology of the land called Palestine and the record of the Bible. But many archaeologists have seen strong evidence in support of the biblical account. Others have questioned various conclusions of the conservatives. There have been debates, for example, whether the entry of Israel in to the land was around

1400 B.C., or as late as 1200 B.C. But we must beware of those who place the entry at the later date and then say there is a lack of evidence to support the entry at that time. In fact, those who follow the Bible's chronology find greater evidence than those who don't.

In fact, there is ample evidence that Israel entered the land and conquered the cities listed in Joshua. Three were burned by fire and the burn layers have been found in those excavations.

In general, there is a mountain of evidence in support of the biblical accounts, and no proven contradictions, according to W.F. Albright.³⁸ While many events go beyond the scope of archaeology, such as the crossing of the Red Sea, there are many facts to support the details of that time period. For example, if one asks "what is one of the oldest cities in Palestine?", the answer is Jericho. This is of course the first city conquered by the Israelites! And century by century, where there are discoveries, they are in line with the framework of the Bible. There is nothing like this for any other ancient religion.

It has long been known that there is a layer of destruction in these ancient cities that corresponds with 1500-1400 B.C., the time of the Conquest. Also at this time is the evidence of Jericho's thick walls having been destroyed.

There are ancient obelisks and steles that also confirm the Israelite presence there. The Merneptah Stele indicates Israel's presence in the land at about 1210 B.C. The evidences for Solomon's kingdom and building projects are strong. These include stables, city gates and three fortified cities that are specifically mentioned.

³⁸ Albright was Professor of Semitic Languages at Johns Hopkins University from the twenties through the fifties. Also leader of the Oriental Research archaeological team.

Throughout the monarchy period of Israel and Judah, there are literally details chiseled in stone that corroborate the Bible. Hundreds of cities and places are mentioned in both the Bible and other records. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, a Syrian king, shows Jehu of Israel bowing down before him in 841 B.C.³⁹ He is bringing tribute and even has tassels on his garments, signifying a tallith, or Jewish prayer shawl.

The Lachish Reliefs (stone slabs) show Sennacherib in a 700 B.C. conquest of an Israelite town.⁴⁰

Also from King Sennacherib of Syria came a clay prism describing his conquests. What is significant, however, is his description of Hezekiah and Jerusalem. Most of the cities he listed were destroyed. But about Jerusalem he says “I had Hezekiah a prisoner in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage”. Perhaps there is no mention of the destruction because the Bible says 185,000 of his army were destroyed and he withdrew (II Kings 19:35). This would explain his unusual listing.⁴¹ One copy of the prism is now in the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago.

Hezekiah’s water tunnel is still there today as a witness to the historicity of the Bible account of his life. (II Kings 20:20)

There are also inscriptions and royal seals of members of Judah’s court and one that says “house of David.”⁴² In other words, at this writing there is much evidence to support the accuracy and antiquity of the Old Testament. Most modern Americans don’t want to take the time to look into the evidence and would rather make generalizations about “myths and legends”.

³⁹ *Archaeological Study Bible*, Zondervan Publishing, pg. 541

⁴⁰ Ibid. pg. 559

⁴¹ Halley’s Bible Handbook, Zondervan, pg. 284

⁴² Archaeological Bible, op cit. pg. 538

Recent Attempts to Destroy Israel

The existence of the State of Israel is an ongoing miracle today, considering all the Arab attempts to destroy them. Israel fought five wars from 1948 to 1981 to defend her existence against overwhelming odds from six different nations at various times.

A war for independence was fought in 1948, followed by another war with Egypt and Syria in 1956. Each time Israel grew stronger. By 1967 it was a crack Israel Defense Force that defeated surrounding nations in the Six Day War. This time they took territory from Syria, Egypt and Jordan, nations who had prepared to annihilate her. Significantly, they took control of Old Jerusalem for the first time since the first century. There were tears of joy at the wailing wall, the section of the temple mount platform closest to the original temple.

The Yom Kippur was of 1973 featured some amazing military tactics against overwhelming odds. Two of the largest tank battles in history were somehow won by the Israelis despite having been taken by surprise on their holiest day of the year. There was a false sense of security and most army people were celebrating the Day of Atonement in their homes. Suddenly, Syria in the north and Egypt in the south unleashed huge armies.

A small Israeli patrol encountered a force of 50,000 soldiers, 600 artillery pieces and 1200 tanks rumbling across the Golan Heights northeast of Galilee. The Israeli force of 6,000 infantry, 60 artillery and 160 tanks fought a holding action but were pushed back almost to the Jordan River.

Within twenty hours reinforcements from Israel arrived and threw hundreds of tanks into the battle. The Israelis destroyed 200 Syrian tanks and retook the Golan Heights.

Meanwhile in the south, Egypt attacked with 8,000 infantry against a small force of 436 Israelis. The lines broke and fell back until reinforcements could arrive. In a short time, nearly 2,000 tanks were engaged on the Sinai Peninsula. After fierce fighting, Egypt lost 264 tanks to Israel's 10! Soon, Ariel Sharon was thrusting through the Egyptian lines back to the Suez Canal, cutting off the Egyptian army.

This is just one of the remarkable battles in Israel's twentieth century struggle. Syria and Egypt were once again defeated and embarrassed.



Psalm 100

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with
joyful songs.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with
praise;
Give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Psalm 149

*Praise the LORD.
Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of
the saints.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing
And make music to him with tambourine and harp.
For the LORD takes delight in his people;
He crowns the humble with salvation.
Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their
beds.
May the praise of God be in their mouths
And a double-edged sword in their hands,
To inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the
peoples,
To bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles
of iron,
To carry out the sentence written against them.
This is the glory of all his saints.*

Chapter Seven

Literature from the Golden Age: Lessons about Life and Worship

The so called poetic books of the Old Testament come from the kingdom period. These are called Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. These books give us a Context for Life before Christ. They are actually several types of literature loosely called poetry. Moreover, Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism, not metre or rhyme.

Job may be an older book that reflects a time back in the patriarchal age. He was a God fearing descendant of Esau. While the setting is older than the Torah, no one really knows when it was written down. While parts of it are narrative about Job's story, it is also a philosophic look at suffering and redemption. What is the nature of God? Why is there pain and suffering in the world?

"Did Job really have patience?" asked Esther as she pondered Matt's current chapter.

"Well, in a way he did, because he never gave up on God. But in another way he complained and questioned God a lot," answered Matt. "But he did respond in great faith when he said, "*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away, may the name of the LORD be praised.*"⁴³

Job: Faith's Tipping Point

Job endured a cosmic test, a challenge from Satan to God about whether a man will trust God. Will he curse God, or trust

⁴³ Job 1:21

Him? Will he make God his enemy or his friend? His adversary or his advocate? This is both a cosmic and a personal issue. In every generation men and women are tested by life's circumstances. We must all make personal decisions about which way we will respond. That is the true test, or tipping point, of faith. It has been said that faith is nothing until it's tested. James and Peter in the New Testament both talk about our faith being purified through trials.

We can learn some lessons from this book. God is sovereign and transcendent, beyond our finite understanding. Experience shows that if we are rooted in faith, we have a better chance of surviving trials. Thirdly, in our personal suffering we must hear the voice of God, not just other people (no matter how well-intentioned). We must maintain humility, even when we don't understand what is happening. We must also avoid simplistic explanations of suffering, such as the idea that sin is always the cause. In the midst of his suffering, Job called out for a Mediator and expressed his stubborn faith:

I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth- 19:35.

In chapter nine, Job calls for an advocate to arbitrate between him and God. Jesus Christ is just such an advocate, according to I John 2:1. In fact, Jesus is the answer to many of Job's questions.

But the book does not end with answers to Job's questions. God appears and challenges him to remain humble. Instead of answering Job's questions, God questions him! We are not to know all the answers in this life. We are to rely on God's greatness and goodness. The One who hurts also heals. In the end, God Himself is the Answer. But those of us in the New Covenant have so much more to go on and so many more promises to claim. God has purpose in all things for those of us who belong to him. Jesus said that he would intercede for us with the Father when we pray in his name.

Psalms: Learning to Praise

Matt and Esther were staying at the Jerusalem Regency Hotel. Their trip coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles and the hotel was filled with an amazing mixture of folks. There were the Orthodox Jews in their black suits and ear locks. There were Christians from all over the world who had come to celebrate the Feast in anticipation of Christ's return, which must seem odd to a lot of Jews. But here they all were in the city of worship, the place where so much of the worship of the Old and New Testaments took place.

Matt and Esther would be attending a praise concert that had Christians attending from seventy nations. They would see flags representing those nations, symbolizing the spread of Christianity around the world from this city. There had been many forms of worship over the centuries, but Christians all over the world were returning to biblical forms, with all instruments, dance and many postures of praise.

Most of us have much to learn about praise. It is not a natural response to God because of our fallen human nature and our human circumstances. Stuff happens, but we can learn to praise God in the midst of it. When praise happens, it is a supernatural response of faith! People are often frustrated by not being able to express their emotional pain or mental anguish. The Psalms help us to do just that. The Psalms express our deepest yearnings and thoughts:

The use of the Psalms is often the first step toward our own deliverance. By song and Spirit they comfort the lonely, strengthen the weary, bind the brokenhearted, and turn the eyes of the downcast up toward their Creator. Hope returns, faith is renewed, and life again becomes bearable.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Spirit Filled Life Bible, Nelson Publishing, p. 684.

We learn from the Psalms to hold on and praise the Lord until victory comes. Many Psalms reflect the time element between our cries to God and the deliverance that comes. Some Psalms are more like prayers and some are more like songs. In the Psalms we learn that praise is active, not passive, as we often find in western cultures. If the Law is about the praise of sacrifice, the worship of the Psalms is about the sacrifice of praise!

Half of the Psalms were written by David and therefore we often use the term “Davidic worship” to express the actions of praise and the passion of praise that we find in his Psalms. His Psalms are often prophetic as well. This literature gives us an intimate view into the life of David. His praise was not just pie in the sky, or denial of reality. But it was about turning opposition into opportunity. David was a Warrior, a Poet, a Statesman and a Musician, and all of these aspects are reflected in his Psalms. One author said that David will have the undying gratitude of millions of people for the way his Psalms help us relate to God. Jesus loved them as well and found himself in them (Ps. 22 for example). *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”*⁴⁵

The Psalms are often divided into categories: Praise, Messianic, Military (Spiritual Warfare), Confessional and Historical. While some reflect the agony of defeat, others reflect the thrill of victory. They show that God is always victorious in the end. He is depicted as Shepherd, King, Savior, Merciful, Rock, Fortress, Strong Tower, and Refuge.



Esther broke in at this point. “Matt, didn’t you say that the Psalms teach us how to worship?”

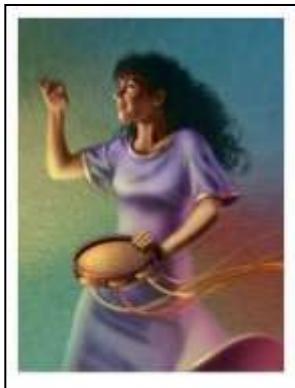
⁴⁵ Matthew 27:46

“Yes, Dear. That’s what I’ve discovered. For example, Psalm 100 tells us to come into His presence with singing and into His courts with praise. Psalm 47 tells us to clap our hands. Psalm 63 speaks of lifting our hands. Psalms 149 and 150 speak of using all kinds of instruments in praise and the dance.”

“Yes, the dance is one of my favorites. I’ve seen some wonderful, worshipful dance at our church, as well as celebration dance.”

“Yet, much of the church has missed out on these blessings because they’ve had such a narrow view of worship. Where I grew up it was just hymns, standing up and sitting down at the right time. But God has brought a worship movement that has swept the church and is getting us ready for things to come.”

“Yes, well praise was certainly a vital part of David’s relationship with the Lord,” added Esther.



“As it was in the early church. I think we’re rediscovering what those early house church meetings must have been like, with great rejoicing, dance and worship of all kinds. I’m sure they used the Psalms a lot and were active in their praise. Even great worship services can be too performance oriented rather than participatory.”

The Messianic Psalms

Burns wanted to note the list of messianic Psalms. These Psalms have remarkable predictions about the life of Jesus the Messiah:

- Psalm 2: *The deity and universal reign of the Messiah*
- Psalm 8: *Through Messiah, humanity is to rule creation*
- Psalm 16: *His resurrection from the dead*
- Psalm 22: *His suffering (in the form of crucifixion)*
- Psalm 45: *His royal bride (the church) and his eternal throne*
- Psalm 69: *His suffering*
- Psalm 72: *The glory and eternity of his reign*
- Psalm 89: *The greater David will reign forever* (Luke 1:32, 33)
- Psalm 110: *Eternal king and priest*
- Psalm 118: *His rejection and becoming the cornerstone*
- Psalm 132: *Eternal heir to David's throne*

There is a corresponding list of New Testament quotations and fulfillments of these verses.⁴⁶ These Psalms, many of which were written around 1,000 B.C., clearly give the outline of Messiah's ministry and were exactly fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. There are ten specific details in Psalm 22 that were fulfilled exactly in Jesus' death. This shows that the author was guided by the Holy Spirit as he wrote. Even today, songwriters sense the Spirit's help and inspiration in writing songs. That is combined with skill and practice, as we are reminded when Psalm 33 says to "play skillfully".

Esther commented on this list. "These are amazing! The whole gospel of Jesus appears centuries before it happened!"

⁴⁶ Halley's Bible Handbook, Zondervan, pg. 323.

“Yes” said Matt. “But how many people even know about this. There are other categories of Psalms as well. Here are my favorites.”

Psalms in the Key of Life

Some Psalms help people in times of grief or depression: 3, 4, 6, 13, 30, 31, 42. Some Psalms help with fear: 20, 23, 27, 34, 46, 91. Some are for guilt: 32, 51 (David confessed his guilt after sin). Some are good for healing: 103, 116. There are many Psalms of gratitude and worship: 8, 9, 33, 47, 63, 65, 92, 95-100, 108, 113.

The Jews sang a whole group of Psalms of Ascent: 120-134. They contain many references to Zion and Jerusalem as the center of worship. The famous Hallelujah Psalms are 146-150. Many of these are great for corporate worship.

There are songs of Restoration, particularly of the nation: 80, 85, 102. Two Psalms particularly lift up the power of the Word of God: 19, and 119. Several refer to God’s covenant faithfulness: 89, 104-107, 114, 118. In Psalm 94:10 we are reminded that God disciplines nations.

Solomon's Contribution

The tradition is that Solomon wrote Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. The Song reflects romantic love in an early period of his life and can be taken as an allegory of God’s love for the church. Proverbs reflects his famous wisdom and his collection of wise sayings. Ecclesiastes contains the reflections of an older man who has tried several philosophies of life and found them wanting. From what we know of Solomon, he spent many years away from God pursuing other worldly things. But he

concludes that all is vanity except “*fearing God and keeping his commandments*”.⁴⁷

These books are unique in their reflections about God, rather than revelation from God. There is much truth in them, but there is also a lot of human opinion. They have to be read carefully to discern between the two. This is not to say that they are not inspired, but that they must be interpreted carefully. These books can be especially instructive to young people who desire wisdom. As the Proverb says, “Get wisdom my son.”⁴⁸

Divided Kingdom

A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. After Solomon’s death, Jereboam rebelled and took the ten northern tribes. No sooner had the kingdom divided, that the northern tribes fell into idolatry. Of all their kings, none were righteous. So God allowed them to be conquered by the Assyrians in less than two hundred years. The southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) had some good kings who brought revival, and that kingdom held on for another hundred years before being conquered by Babylon.

Under the six good kings of Judah, there were revivals that extended the life of the southern kingdom. People today are praying for revival in Christian America to stem the tide of evil and preserve the nation a little longer. We are overdue for revival, and many wonder if it will ever come on a wide scale. But human nature is such that it usually takes major calamity to turn people back to God. 9/11 was one calamity that had a temporary effect. But for the most part, the nation has returned to the path of secularism and the highway to hell.

Asa, the first good king of Judah, reigned for 41 years (while seven bad kings came and went in the north). He served the

⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:13

⁴⁸ Proverbs 4:1-5

Lord with great zeal and broke down many altars to foreign Gods. Under his rule the nation had prosperity. Jehoshaphat followed in his father's footsteps and reigned for 25 years. He sent priests and Levites out across the land to teach the Law. He had a powerful army but listened to the Lord and once sent the praisers into battle first. "The battle is the Lord's," is a great lesson from his experience (II Chron. 20).

A few kings later, Joash reigned for forty years, many of them good. But like his father Solomon, he turned from the true worship of Yahweh. Uzziah was known as a good king in being mostly faithful to the Lord and reigned 52 years, a stable period for Judah. Isaiah's ministry began near the end of Uzziah's reign. Two not-so-great kings followed before Hezekiah brought another revival. He repaired and cleansed the temple. During his 29 years he mostly listened to the advice of Isaiah. God saved them from an invasion of the Assyrians under Sennacherib. At one point God's angel of death destroyed 180,000 troops that had come against Jerusalem.

However, Hezekiah's son Manasseh had a long, wicked reign of 55 years. He rebuilt altars and reinstated Baal worship, which required child sacrifice. Manasseh burned his own sons in fire to a false god. By the end of his reign he had nearly ruined the nation. But God brought one more revival through good king Josiah. He took the throne when he was only eight and reigned for 31 years. His reforms delayed the destruction of Judah, but did not change the hearts of the people sufficiently. The last three kings of Judah were vassals of Egypt and Babylon.

The control of Judah shifted to Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. The last kings rebelled against him, against the advice of Jeremiah, leading to the destructive siege of Jerusalem and burning of the temple. Needless destruction was sustained as a result of the rebellion. Some exiles were taken to Babylon in 606 (possibly Ezekiel), but many more were taken in 586, after the destruction. Thus, the captivity began in 606 and the first exiles returned under a decree of Cyrus the Persian in 536. The destruction of the temple

in 586, ended when the rebuilt temple was dedicated in 516, also a period of seventy years, prophesied by Jeremiah.

The lessons of God continually fall upon his people: obedience leads to blessing, disobedience leads to conquest and curses. God's judgment does not come quickly or lightly, but it does come certainly after many warnings. Even today, America strays from her Judeo-Christian foundation at her own peril. God's judgment may not be immediate, but it will be certain. Moreover, it seems that Americans are slow to recognize God's judgments, either in natural disasters, economic crises, or foreign attacks.

Isaiah 2:2-4

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Isaiah 2:12-19

The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled), for all the cedars of Lebanon, tall and lofty, and all the oaks of Bashan, for all the towering mountains and all the high hills, for every lofty tower and every fortified wall, for every trading ship and every stately vessel. The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men will be humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day and the idols will totally disappear. Men will flee to caves

in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth.

Isaiah 40: 1-9

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "in the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken"...

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

Related Reading- Isaiah 40-66

Chapter Eight

Prophets Speak the Gospel in Advance: Isaiah: The Messianic Prophet

Secular Man: Wasn't the book of Isaiah actually written hundreds of years after the prophet to make it look like predictive prophecy?

This was the prevailing theory in the mid twentieth century among liberals. "Isaiah is simply too supernatural and profound to have been written by one man 700 years before Christ."

Yet, the evidence proves otherwise. First of all, the book has always been recognized and discussed by Jewish rabbis as the work of Isaiah. Secondly, attempts to divide the book up into sections written at different times by different men do not hold water.

There are short term and long term prophecies mixed together throughout the book. It's as if God is saying, "what I'm doing in your day is a preview of what I will be doing throughout history and even to the last days." Historical vignettes are side by side and integrated with future prophecies. Try to separate these ideas and the book makes no sense.

Isaiah is the Mt. Everest of the Old Testament. It looks forward over many mountain ranges to future periods of history. He is considered one of the greatest prophets. "He is quoted in the New Testament more than any other prophet. What a mind he had. In some of his rhapsodies he reaches heights unequaled even by Shakespeare, Milton or Homer."⁴⁹ The Gospel of John says that "Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him" (12:41). He may be

⁴⁹ Halley's Bible Handbook, pg. 367

considered the highest peak in the Old Testament because he sees far into the future, as well as intermediate and immediate events. His ministry was from 745- 695 B.C.

Isaiah shows emerging themes in the Old Testament. The significance of physical Israel is dwarfed by the promise of Messiah and international salvation. Secondly, a remnant of Israel would be saved and enjoy the blessings of a new heaven and a new earth. This may be as small as “one from each town and two from each clan,”⁵⁰ but that remnant would carry the kingdom to the world and God would bring the world to Jerusalem.

When God addresses Jacob or Jerusalem, he is most often referring to physical Israel. When he addresses Israel or Zion, he often is referring to spiritual Israel- the true believers of both Jewish and Gentile descent. For example, in Is. 49 he says of Messiah, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (49:6). By chapter 60, Zion becomes the eternal city of God.

There are references to Messiah (Jesus) throughout the book, beginning with the great Virgin Birth prophecy of 7:14. “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and will call him Immanuel.” When Matthew quotes this he adds the translation for Immanuel “which means ‘God with us’.”

Matt was thinking of Isaiah when he and Esther toured Galilee. Isaiah 9:1-2 was the devotion for the day: *“In the past he humbled the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”* Yes, they were now looking at the seashore where the Son of God announced himself, preached and performed

⁵⁰ Jeremiah 3:14

miracles. They looked across the water and saw a boat that looked much like the boats of the fishermen in the first century.

They were looking toward the site of ancient towns like Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin. These were towns where Jesus had spent much time, done many miracles, yet without a great response from the people. Later Jesus pronounced judgment upon them for their lack of faith. The ruins of Capernaum are well worth seeing, with the remnants of the synagogue, Peter's house and many other dwellings of the fishing village which was once Jesus' headquarters.

It is not hard to imagine the fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James and John who once plied these waters; Jesus teaching from one of their boats; the many conversations and healings along the shore. The rock in this area is dark and volcanic, not like the surrounding sandstones and limestones. There is still a species of fish in the lake like the one from Jesus' day. It is a type of Tilapia and is often called St. Peter's fish in the local restaurants.



Sea of Galilee

Burns turned back to Isaiah to one of the most astounding Messianic prophecies. Isaiah 9:6 reveals that the Son to be born will have a dual nature, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” This child will be both son and Father, God and Prince. This can be true of only one person born in history; the only one born of a virgin, thus having the nature of both man and God.

In chapter eleven the Messiah is revealed as a stump from Jesse (David’s father) and a Branch that will bear fruit (the word is *Nezer*, the same root as Nazareth.) The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him. He will be a righteous judge that will bring peace to the world, even to the point that wild animals will get along with each other and with little children.

These early predictions of Messiah (chapters 7-12) are followed by chapters about judgment on Israel’s enemies (13-35) and a historical interlude about Isaiah and King Hezekiah (36-39). The Assyrians have entered the land and a huge army was threatening Jerusalem. It is Isaiah that promises Hezekiah that his enemies will go back the way they came and that God would defend the city.

Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.⁵¹

We don’t know what means the angel used to put these soldiers to death, but God reminded the people that he is quite capable of handling such things if they will seek Him.

⁵¹ Isaiah 37:36, 37

Then comes the turning point chapter of the book. From chapter forty on, the book looks farther and farther into the future, the coming of Messiah the Servant of God, the future restoration of Israel, and the eternal states of heaven and hell. This section contains almost the entire gospel in one form or another. What a breathtaking view!

Because of the marked transition from judgment to hope and the number of specific predictions about Messiah in the last part of the book, liberal critics tried to prove that this part was written by someone much later than Isaiah. There are a number of reasons why this cannot be true.

Secular Man: Weren't Isaiah and other prophecies actually written by several authors and edited later to make them look like predictions?⁵²

The Unity of Isaiah

Despite the attempts of critics, the unity of Isaiah is substantiated in several ways. First, that his writings were handed down from generation to generation by exacting copyists called scribes. Secondly, the entire book was translated into Greek around 250 B.C. as part of the Septuagint. This was a translation made by rabbis in Alexandria, Egypt for the king of that day and for the Jews that had been Hellenized by learning the Greek language.

Thirdly, the discovery of the Isaiah scroll in the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 shows the accuracy of the ancient scribes and their manuscripts. This manuscript was dated at anywhere from the first century B.C. to the time of Christ. The Messianic passages were clearly in circulation before the fulfillments of Jesus. Students of

⁵² This was a popular approach by critics in the 50's and 60's in university "Bible as literature" classes. This was actually liberal propaganda being spread in literature classes with volumes like the Dartmouth Bible.

the Old Testament who were open to the Spirit quickly saw that Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies. This is why 3,000 of them responded to the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. “God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”⁵³ Even the Rabbi Saul (Shaul) could not continue to deny what his conscience told him to be true. He became a follower of Jesus and the great missionary apostle of the first century. Acts records that a number of priests came to the faith as well.⁵⁴

Except for an anti-supernatural bias, there is no reason to doubt that the entire work was from Isaiah. Really, the latter chapters are just the continuation and amplification of the Messianic passages we have already looked at. Such messianic passages are woven throughout the book. The difference between the first part of the book and the second is the subject matter. There are less historic references and more references to the future kingdom that was introduced in chapter two.

The Suffering Servant is introduced in chapter 42. He will be the vehicle to take Israel to the future kingdom. Although the majority of Jewish people today do not see these as references to Messiah, the early rabbis of Jesus’ day did! There was speculation as to whether Messiah would be a suffering servant as here, or a conquering servant. Some even speculated two Messiahs: Messiah ben Josef (the son of Joseph who would suffer like Joseph) or Messiah ben David (the son of David who would reign like David). Messianic believers have always seen both Messiah’s embodied in two coming of Christ (which is the Greek word for messiah). The meaning of servant in that day included the idea of a chosen one, or trusted envoy. These songs (42, 49, 50 and 53) crescendo, adding pieces of information to complete the picture of Immanuel begun in chapters 7, 9, and 11. The climax is in chapter 53 which so vividly portrays crucifixion and resurrection. All of this is predicted over 700 years before Christ.

⁵³ Acts 2:36

⁵⁴ Acts 6:7

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice... I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.—42:1-3, 6, 7

There is a controversial passage in chapters 44 and 45 about the character who will deliver Israel from her exile which would come in 586 B.C. Cyrus, God's anointed, was not even born until a hundred and fifty years after Isaiah's life.

I am the LORD, who has made all things...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "let it be rebuilt" and of the temple, "let its foundations be laid". This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus... (44:24, 28, 45:1).

All of this is predicted before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, as if it had already happened. But these verses are closely woven into broader passages about how the LORD is going to display his glory. What else but predictive prophecy would display his glory in such a way? The fact that Isaiah predicted the very name of the Persian king who would release Israel from captivity made a deep impression on later Jews. It is also interesting that Isaiah would predict captivity by a Babylonian king and release by a Persian king seventy years later. God, of course, knew that Babylon would be conquered by the Persians.

More Servant Songs

It is hinted in the first servant song that the messiah will be for all peoples. This is developed further in the second servant song:

Listen to me you islands, hear this you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.” But I said, “I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD;s hand, and my reward is with my God.” And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” 49:1-6

Burns had many revelations as he read these verses. How could so many Jews have missed the references to the messiah and specific plans God had for him? In a general way God speaks of Israel as the servant, but there is so much more. The ultimate goal of the servant is to bring not only Jacob (the tribes of Israel) back to God, but to spread salvation over the entire earth! This reminded Matt of Jesus' statement that he was sent to the lost house of Israel, followed by Paul's proclamation that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Rom. 1:16 The servant is named before his birth (like

Jesus) and called from the womb. He is at first an arrow concealed and then launched into the world. Christians like to say that Jesus is concealed in the Old Testament and revealed in the New! There is even the imagery here of the sword of Jesus' mouth. This sword stands for the word of God and is carried as a symbol through the New Testament all the way to Jesus' appearance in Revelation One. It is very clear that the servant will be sent to the Gentiles as well as Israel. Burns remembered that Jesus' Hebrew name, Yeshua, stands for "God is Salvation".

The third servant song is found in Isaiah 50:4-10. This refers to the obedience of the servant, who teaches what he hears from the Sovereign LORD. He even offers his back to those who beat him and those who will pull out his beard. This of course, reminded Matt of Jesus' treatment at the hands of the Romans, which included mocking and spitting (v. 6). The servant will be vindicated after his unjust suffering. Verse ten asks:

"Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God."

Burns was already amazed at how Jesus fit these prophecies, but the 4th and greatest was yet to come.

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of

sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet is was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12

At this point Burns was overcome with emotion at the way these verses told the story of the gospel in advance. He could see nearly twenty distinct points of congruity between Isaiah's servant and the life and ministry of Christ. It was as if Isaiah had seen the events of Jesus' crucifixion, just as they were recorded in the gospels! Yet these passages were 700 years before Christ! They

carefully explained the nature of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. The various aspects of suffering are listed: marred, disfigured, chastised, pierced, crushed, wounded, oppressed. Various types of sin were carried by him: transgressions and iniquities. Somewhere Matt had heard a teaching on this: transgressions were laws broken, but iniquities had more to do with our sinful nature, pride, and rebellion.

Jesus had carried our infirmities, or diseases, as well as sorrows and wounds. One can see him bearing his cross to Calvary. Yet, by his wounds we are healed; by his punishment we have peace; through his guilt offering we are forgiven. He was tried illegally and convicted falsely, yet did not defend himself. He was cut off from the land of the living and assigned a grave with the wicked, yet with the rich in his death. Who could figure the irony of such a riddle? Yet, in Jesus' death and burial it was fulfilled. He was convicted to die between two thieves. Yet, in a bizarre twist, was buried in a rich man's grave. All this happened though he was totally innocent.

Yet, it was the Lord's will for his son to go through all this in our place. After suffering he would see the light, prolong his days, and see many people justified. What could fulfill this besides a resurrection and eternal life? "Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me" were the next thoughts that crossed Matt's mind. Jesus had taken the punishment he deserved. He was not proud of his earlier life, but it was now completely forgiven and he had a new life through Christ. The fourth servant song is so powerful, which was left out of the synagogue readings.

The Rest of Isaiah's Story

God has always used predictive prophecy to give credibility to his true prophets. False prophets were to be discarded. But Isaiah and the others passed the test again and again and were retained as the true prophets of Israel. The first messianic section

in chapter seven is firmly rooted in the time of King Ahaz, early in Isaiah's career. The last messianic section, chapters 59-61, come from later in Isaiah's career. He revisits what the kingdom of the Messiah will be like. It will be a time when the Redeemer comes. The passage introduces him as the Lord's "own arm".

The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him....the Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD.

"As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the LORD.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you... Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn... Then you will know that I the LORD am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob...I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day...for the LORD will be your everlasting light.⁵⁵

Highlights from these chapters take us forward from earthly Zion to the eternal city of God. It is not certain which verses apply to which, but there is a progression from natural to spiritual. There are still verses that seem to apply to Israel even today, or to the church, or to heaven. Notice the dual references in chapter 61:

⁵⁵ Is. 59:15, 16, 20, 21, 60:1-19 (selected)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn and provide for all those who grieve in Zion—a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair... and you will be called priests of the LORD, and will be named ministers of our God.⁵⁶

Many will recognize in these verses the glimpses of Jesus' ministry. While in the synagogue at Capernaum, He identified himself as the one on whom the Spirit rested in Luke 4. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:21) There is salvation and deliverance through faith in him. We are all priests in his new kingdom and ministers in various ways. All in all, these are very uplifting verses. The part that Jesus left out as he read from Isaiah in his synagogue was the part about the day of God's vengeance, because that was not the purpose of his first coming. He will, however, come again in judgment and justice. The grieving in this passage has the larger meaning of repentance. In other words, for those who repent of sins and receive the anointed one of God (Messiah), all these blessings will accrue.

⁵⁶ 61:1-6



Synagogue Ruins at Capernaum

Isaiah: God's Facebook

Esther noted that Isaiah is a self-revelation of God, somewhat like a Facebook account on the internet. “On Facebook you tell something about yourself that you think your friends would like to know. That would be like God revealing his character in chapters 41 and 42. That’s called a Profile. Sometimes you also share things that are coming up in your life. That would be like God sharing prophecies with us. He also gives us information that we need to hear from someone who knows the future. God says his people have a future that will include salvation, restoration and hope.”

“That’s a great analogy, Esther.” Matt answered.

In the meantime, God points out Israel’s sins and posts them on the “wall” for others to see. This is not recommended for your personal Facebook account today! Do unto others as you

would like them to do for you, including respecting their privacy and yours. Sadly, some people put far too much information on their Wall.

God also posts some messages for the nations on the Wall. He will judge those nations who rebel against him. But the most important profile God puts in this Facebook is the profile of his suffering Servant, the Messiah. There are pictures of him throughout the book, first of all as a child in chapters 7 and 9. Finally, as the suffering servant of the four servant songs between chapters 42 and 53.

The Timing and Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls

It is hard to appreciate just how significant the finding of the first scrolls was in 1947. Just months before the statehood of Israel, the complete scroll of Isaiah was found in a cave near Qumran by the Dead Sea.

The original seven scrolls were found by a Bedouin boy looking for his goat. The Bedouins made it known in Jerusalem that they had a find that might be of interest. Professor Sukenik was able to purchase three scrolls from them, including Isaiah. Later, the other four were regained by the Israelis after being sold to someone in the United States.

While the Jews and Christians had copies of Isaiah continuously in their Scriptures, critics had been picking the traditional view apart and attacking the authenticity of the book; until 1947, that is. This discovery took the manuscript evidence back a thousand years earlier, showing that the complete book was in circulation at the time of Christ, and that there had been no changes in the text.

Not only that, but what a birthday present from God to the state of Israel! Isaiah's very last chapter talks about a "nation being born in a day" and that took place in May 1948 when Israel declared her statehood.⁵⁷ One can choose to believe these are only coincidences if one desires, but for most of us this is another miracle. The Isaiah Scroll is on display in the museum in Jerusalem called the Shrine of the Book. It is in a circular showcase under the dome of the building that is shaped like the lid of the jar the scrolls were found in.

Matt and Esther had already visited the Shrine of the Book. Today they were in the desert at Qumran. They walked around the dusty paths and remains of buildings of the community that was known for copying and preserving the Scriptures. It was just north of this site that the original cave discovery was made. And another cave had been found at this site, that all the visitors could clearly see. There has been much speculation about the Essenes, their role in the first century, and their apocalyptic beliefs. However there is no speculation about the valuable service they did for mankind in hiding the scrolls from the oncoming Roman legion that was bent on eradicating the Jewish culture.



⁵⁷ Is. 66:8

Qumran by the Dead Sea

The Essenes were a monastic community for those who had withdrawn from the mainstream of Judea. They had moved down toward the Dead Sea to study the Scriptures, and speculate about the end of the world. They were apocalyptic in their beliefs that there would be a great final battle of good and evil. They spoke of a teacher of righteousness, based on Old Testament prophecies, but there is no evidence that they accepted Jesus as the one who fulfilled these prophecies. They copied and hid hundreds of scrolls, many of which have now been found in over a dozen various caves in the region. Perhaps there are others waiting to be discovered. But it seems that the greatest discovery was the scrolls of Isaiah in the very first cave in 1947.



Cave at Qumran

Jeremiah 1:1-10

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

“Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Related Reading- Jeremiah

Chapter Nine

Jeremiah the Bad News Prophet

Secular Man: Isn't God just a killjoy? He is always condemning mankind.

Jeremiah exposes man's perennial problem—he is a sinner. This flies in the face of contemporary man's estimation of himself. "We're basically good and have good intentions." Well, you know about good intentions. The problem is, man is seldom able to carry out good intentions. He often regresses to various degrees of degeneracy.

A hundred years after Isaiah, Jeremiah was faced with a dire situation. The sins of Judah had heaped up until God could stand it no more. Idolatry had run rampant. While Hezekiah had led a revival a hundred years earlier, his son Manasseh had set new lows of wickedness for his fifty year reign. Even later revivals could not stop the slide of Judah into destruction.

Jeremiah and the young King Josiah started working together to reform Judah when they were both in their twenties. (Though Jeremiah claims he is only a child, this is probably a feeling of inexperience, rather than his actual age.) Jeremiah and the King had a few good years, but the end drew near upon Josiah's death in 608 B.C. By 606 Judah had been subdued by Babylon and the first exiles were taken at that time.

During this season Jeremiah counseled cooperation with Babylon. For this he was vilified and persecuted. On the other hand, false prophets gave the people a false sense of security. Even today, people would rather listen to the false prophets who pretend that God doesn't care about our sins.

God asks the people in chapter 7: “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching.” (7:9-11). This reminds us of Jesus cleansing the temple and saying about the house that was supposed to be for prayer, “you have made it a den of robbers”.

Chapters 17 and 31 are outstanding chapters in the book. Chapter seventeen begins on a somber note and reminds us in verse 9 that “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” But then it holds out hope that “blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord”. Verse 14 says “Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.”

In chapter 18 the Lord reminds Israel that he is the potter and that she is the clay. He can destroy his creation or reshape it as he chooses. Yet she can still repent if she chooses. But Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were stubborn kings and would not repent, or submit to Babylon’s rule. Thus, Judah and Jerusalem brought upon herself the final destruction of 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had had enough of Judah’s insolence and rebellion. After a terrible siege the Babylonian’s broke through the walls and burned the city and the temple.

In the midst of destruction, Jeremiah is given hope for the future in two prophecies. One is the Righteous Branch prophecy of Messiah in chapter 23, and the other is the New Covenant prophecy of chapter 31. In between these chapters it is revealed the Judah’s captivity will last seventy years (25:11). The first part of chapter 31 speaks of national restoration of a remnant. There is even a glimpse of future joy and comfort. Following this will be a New Covenant. In this covenant the Lord will write his law in their minds and on their hearts, “and I will be their God and they will be my people.”



Burning of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

This covenant was introduced by Jesus on the night he was betrayed when he revealed that his blood would be shed for the new covenant and remission of sins.⁵⁸ Remission or forgiveness is an important word in contrast to the temporary rolling back of sins in the Old Covenant. Sacrifices would only roll back sins for a year, since they had to be offered again year after year. The forgiveness that Jesus offers is once and for all. His last supper gave a radical new beginning to the Passover meal.

The climax of Jeremiah's prophecy comes in chapter 39 with the fall of Jerusalem. The horror of this destruction is described in Jeremiah's lament, called Lamentations. For many of us today, who watch a once godly nation slide toward degradation, we can identify somewhat with Jeremiah. It has been forty years since Woodstock, which many celebrate as some kind of "coming out party." But what came out of it was mostly licentiousness posing as freedom. Since then we have seen the gates of truth assaulted by media, academia, political leaders, and scientists. It seems the whole society has fallen for the lie of secular humanism. Man can do it himself. He can save the planet.

⁵⁸ Matt. 26:28

But in contrast to the majority of humanists, there is a large minority, a remnant, of true believers: believers in the Judeo-Christian tradition that built western civilization; believers in a biblical world-view; and refugees from failed liberal lifestyles, broken marriages, abortion, etc. Many are holding to the promise of Jeremiah 29:11, that after captivity, God still has a “hope and a future” for us. Burns noticed that even for the bad news prophet there was hope. Like Jeremiah, we have watched walls come down and even literally seen our enemies defeat us on days like 9/11. Terrorists have ravaged our population at home and abroad. Babylon has risen once again under Saddam Hussein to create havoc in the Middle East and draw the United States into war. Like ancient Israel, we will not defeat our enemies without resolve and without repentance. Unless there is revival in this land and repentance for the holocaust of abortion and other flaunting of the laws of God, we may not defeat them. We may be seeing the events of the last days taking shape before our eyes.

And so while we may pray for revival, we also realize that some events like end-time apostasy and judgment are inevitable. The great falling away is happening before our eyes in Protestantism, with almost every denomination being split between liberal humanists and more conservative, fundamental believers. Even Evangelicalism is splitting between conservatives and liberals. The warfare is always to get us to compromise the clear teachings of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

Secular Man- It seems like God was so cruel to Israel and then Babylon.

Modern man does not like to think of God’s judgment at all. But God’s judgment is always fair and not without ample warning. Israel had to suffer because of her idolatry. God stated his view of his people in chapter two of Jeremiah: “My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (2:13). God wanted to be Israel’s provision and would have blessed her abundantly. Yet they rejected his

counsel and his exclusivity. He warned them repeatedly over centuries, but they did not heed the prophets. Nor did they learn from the fall of the northern kingdom in 722. Likewise the great Babylonian Empire did not learn from Israel and was conquered by the Persians.

The Lamentations of Destruction

II Chronicles 36: 15-21 records what Jeremiah witnessed in 586 in Jerusalem.

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant who escaped the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

These are some of the saddest words ever written. There was no other remedy. God had tried and tried to warn them. Perhaps if we would focus on just how terrible this tragedy was, it might help us wake up and see what is at stake today. God did not spare his own people, but he did spare a remnant to continue his purposes in the earth. Some have said that the land enjoyed a

Sabbath rest because the Israelites had not obeyed God concerning the sabbatical years.

In the looting of the temple, all the sacred furniture and articles was taken, with one possible exception. No one, Jewish or Christian, believes that the people and priests of Jerusalem would just stand by and watch the ark be captured. Many people believe that the ark was hidden at that time. Regardless, it has never been seen since, nor mentioned in literature after that time. Some Jews who want to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem believe that it will appear when God's time is right. Many Christians believe it will resurface as well. Only time will tell.

At this point Esther raised a good question: "Lamentations? Why would you want to mention that? Isn't it like a funeral dirge?"

"Well, Esther, perhaps that's exactly why we should mention it. God must have wanted us to read it because he made sure it was included with sacred Scripture. Perhaps it emphasizes the cost of rebelling against Him."

Like an enemy he has strung his bow; his right hand is ready. Like a foe he has slain all who were pleasing to the eye; he has poured out his wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion. The LORD is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds. He has multiplied mourning and lamentation for the Daughter of Judah. He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting (the temple). The LORD has made Zion forget her appointed feasts and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest. The LORD has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has handed over to the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed feast... The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground (shame). My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment

*within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, “Where is bread and wine?” as they faint like wounded men in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers’ arms. What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you that I may comfort you O Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?*⁵⁹

For five chapters this lament goes on. What needless tragedy came upon God’s people! The text makes clear that this is God’s doing, not just the Babylonian empire. Indeed, things would have gone much better for the Jews if they had submitted to their conquerors. But the wicked kings refused to do that. The few righteous, like Jeremiah, were swept away with the wicked. Obviously a lot of innocent women and children suffered as a result of Judah’s sin. Such pain & suffering is the enigma of our world. It is overwhelming. But we should keep in mind the logic of C.S. Lewis who said there is really no such thing as cumulative suffering. Each person only has a finite amount of their own suffering, as great as they may be. However, Christ endured that kind of suffering for each of us.

There is one bright spot in the book, a glimmer of hope. In chapter three we find these words: “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. (3:22-25)

⁵⁹ Lamentations 2: 4-13

Ezekiel 36: 8-27 (selected)

But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt...then you will know that I am the LORD... It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations...for I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws

Ezekiel 37: 4-10

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain,

that they may live.''" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Related Reading- Ezekiel and Daniel

Chapter Ten

Ezekiel and National Restoration

He has to be the oddest prophet of all. At the very least, God asked him to do some odd things. We would call these dramatic illustrations. These included lying on his side for a year. (We assume he took food and bathroom breaks); digging through a wall to show the coming destruction of Jerusalem.; cooking over dung fires; all things to depict destruction. Ezekiel was already in Babylon as part of the captivity when he carried out his ministry. The first group of captives could still not believe that Jerusalem and their beloved temple would be destroyed. But Ezekiel assured them that it would happen. Many of his early visions showed God's displeasure with his people. The turning point comes when the captives receive word from Jerusalem that the city has indeed fallen and Ezekiel was vindicated as a true prophet (chapter 33).

He also saw some glorious visions of the throne of God, and the glory of God (chapters 1 and 10), indicating that God's glory was not just confined to a building in Jerusalem! (In fact, the vision Ezekiel saw was the glory of God departing from the temple.) A great vision of restoration occurs in chapters 36 and 37. There would be a restoration of the land and of the people. The people were pictured as a vast field of dry bones. The situation looked hopeless. But God would someday command the bones to come back together, put flesh on them and eventually breathe life into them. Many people believe that the statehood of Israel in 1948 was a part of the fulfillment of this vision. The first stage of the dry bones may indicate a re-gathering of Israel in unbelief: thus there is no breath in them (37: 8). Finally, as God breathes on them again and puts his Spirit in them (v. 14), the restoration is complete. That cannot happen today unless they receive the Messiah as Lord. Acts 2:38 sets the new covenant pattern for this: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Yeshua the Messiah for the forgiveness of sin and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Most people see this prophecy (36,37) as a twentieth century event because nothing like it happened between Ezekiel's time and the first century. While the remnant of Israel returned to their land in 536-445 B.C, they never became a mighty army and were mostly subject to other empires up to and through the time of Christ. Nor did the remnant at that time return from many nations as in verse 8 of the next section:

"Son of Man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him and say: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you.

'Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them. After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety. You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land- 38:2-9.

This later vision (ch. 38, 39) portrays a great final battle between the forces of good and evil. A coalition of nations comes against Israel and is destroyed at the last minute by fire, earthquake, rain, hail and burning sulfur. The lead actors are Gog and Magog. Gog is the prince of Magog. The battle sounds like Armageddon, though some commentators believe Armageddon is a separate event. It certainly will be part of the last judgment of the

nations who rebel against God and move against the nation of Israel.

Can we see evidence of this today? Are we closer than ever before to these end time events? Well, it seems there is only one nation to the far north of Israel (vs. 6, 15) and that is Russia. Today Russia is busy forming alliances with several Islamic countries like Iran (Persia) and Syria, and Cush and Put in Africa (old names for areas like Sudan and Libya). Authors like Joel Rosenberg see several scenarios of how this might play out politically. Russia has several motivations for conquest in the Middle East, but the greatest by far is oil. Perhaps we have counted her out prematurely with the supposed end of the Cold War.

Russia supplies nuclear help to Iran's new President Ahmadinejad, an outspoken Muslim autocrat. As soon as he took power in 2005, he began promising the destruction of Israel and the west. As author Joel Rosenberg says, it may not be long before Russia and Iran together exercise the "Ezekiel Option", spoken of in chapters 38 and 39. It is not hard to imagine Libya and Sudan (hard-line Muslim nations) joining in such a coalition. Ironically, Egypt and Jordan, the two nations that have made separate peace agreements with Israel, are not included in this prophecy! (Gomer and Beth Togarmah may refer to countries like Turkey or the Ukraine.) Of course, the good news is that the invasion ends with the destruction of this vast army! Ezekiel chapter 39 says that there will be no atheists left. All will see the Lord's hand and Spirit!

Jerusalem Today

Matt and Esther paused to consider what they had witnessed in their tour of modern Israel—a modern nation with ancient roots. There were twentieth century cities like Tel Aviv overlaying ancient cities and areas. Nowhere is this more evident than Jerusalem. The Old City, a one mile square surrounded by

ancient walls, is surrounded by a new city of 750,000 people. David first settled there in 1,000 B.C. The city was visited several times by Christ after it had been destroyed and rebuilt. Then, forty years after Christ it was destroyed again. Several conquests took place in the Middle Ages until a fourteenth century Arab king rebuilt the current walls. Modern buildings like the Knesset rise on the Western Hill, as do shopping malls. There are two possible sites of the crucifixion and resurrection, one totally covered by a church dating back to the fourth century (at least as far as the original structure on the site.)

The temple platform is still there, but it is occupied by two mosques, one dating back to the seventh century. One quarter of the Old City is called the Arab Quarter. Another is called the Jewish Quarter. The rest of the Old City is divided between the Armenian and the Christian quarters.

There are many wonderful buildings to see and excavations of ancient sites. The mixture of people and religions is fascinating in itself—Orthodox Jews and secular Jews, Catholic Churches, Greek Orthodox Christians and Armenian Priests, as well as many evangelical Christians. There are many Arab shopkeepers (and some of them are actually Christian, though most are Muslim.)

Then there is the temple mount itself, towering over the eastern part of the old city. It was taken by the Muslims in the seventh century A.D. and there are two mosques on top, the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa mosque. One hears the call to prayer five times a day from the prayer towers (minarets).



Modern View of Jerusalem from Mt. of Olives

Daniel's Timeline for Messiah

If Ezekiel gives us fascinating insights into the end of the world, Daniel gives many equally fascinating insights into the intermediate history of the world leading up to the time of Messiah. Besides the historical section of Daniel, which shows how a pure young Jewish exile in Babylon rises to the courts of power, there are several miracles and visions. We know of the fiery furnace in chapter three and the lion's den in chapter six. We know that Daniel is given the power to interpret dreams for Nebuchadnezzar the emperor of the time. But Daniel is also given insights into four kingdoms that will come after Babylon. In one vision, a giant stature represents the kingdoms: the head of gold is Babylon, the chest of silver is Persia, the bronze legs are Greece, and the mixed iron and clay feet are Rome. In the days of the fourth kingdom, an eternal kingdom will be set up, but not by human hands (chapter 2: 36-45).



In Daniel nine, we are given a timetable leading to the arrival of the Messiah. This was written by Daniel somewhere around 530 B.C. and details accurately the years to the actual ministry of Christ. There would be a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. We know that decree was given around 445 B.C., or the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. From that time there would be 70 weeks (of years) which would lead to the completion of a period for God's people (the Jews).⁶⁰ At the end of that time (483 lunar years) they would be offered a covenant by a Messiah figure. While there are some details like lunar (360 day) years to be accounted for, the prophecy ends at the time of Christ's ministry!

Daniel introduces the Messiah, or "Anointed One" in chapter 7:13:

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away.

No wonder Jesus' favorite designation for himself was the Son of Man. This was his way of claiming messiahship. It culminated in his quoting of this verse before Caiaphas, which was condemned as blasphemy.⁶¹

Then Daniel details the work of the Messiah in chapter nine:

Seventy sevens are decreed for you people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

⁶⁰ Daniel 9:21-26

⁶¹ Matthew 26:64

Know and understand this: from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens...After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing.⁶²

This certainly sounds like what happened to Christ. He came on schedule with Daniel's time line. He had a three and a half year ministry and was cut off. Yet, he accomplished all the work that God had given him, such as atoning for wickedness, putting an end to sin and entering the Holy Place "once and for all".⁶³ As a result of his work he brought in everlasting righteousness (salvation for all who believe) and fulfilled (sealed up) many visions and prophecies. And as far as finishing transgression for the holy city, they rejected Jesus and within forty years were destroyed. The finishing of transgression might have had a much more positive outcome had they accepted the messiah of peace at that time.

One of the most insightful comments about the time of Messiah is this: he had to come before the destruction of the temple (70 AD) to fulfill several prophecies. But he had to come after this 483 year period! That leaves only the window of 30-70 AD! Add to this that if Messiah had come a few years before the time of Jesus of Nazareth, he would have been executed by stoning, not by Roman crucifixion. Therefore, the piercings of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 would not have taken place.

*He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our sins
The punishment that brought us peace was upon him
And by his wounds, by his wounds we are healed.
We are healed by your sacrifice and the life that you gave
We are healed for you paid the price, by your grace we are saved!⁶⁴*

⁶² Daniel 9: 24-26

⁶³ Hebrews 10:10

⁶⁴ "By His Wounds" from The Glory Revealed collection.

“You know, Matt, reading about these prophets reminds me both of my earlier life of rebellion and sadness, and of the grace of the Lord who has saved me and given me a “hope and a future”. These passages are incredible. To think that that’s what Jesus meant when He called himself the Son of Man. How misunderstood that is!”

“There are so many misunderstandings about God,” replied Matt. “It’s like a conspiracy against the truth.”

Matt Burns Uncovers a Conspiracy

So as straightforward as God’s plan is, why does it become so neglected and ignored? Could there be a Satanic conspiracy against truth? Over and over again through history it seems that truth is distorted. Is it only because man is that rebellious? Matt suspected that it is more than just man. There is a partnership of rebellious man with Satan, who is constantly feeding him misinformation. How else can we explain the descent of thinking human beings into chaos over and over again?

For example, how could Germany, an intelligent, advanced western Christian nation descend into the pits of Nazism, war and genocide? Scholars will, of course, give you some reasons: anti-Semitism, evolutionary racial theories, failure of the Weimar republic, harsh treatment by the allies after World War I. Yet, none of this can totally explain what happened. Hitler seems to have been led into occultism himself, and used ideas of occultism throughout his time in power. His attack on the church coincided with his attack on the Jews. By controlling the state Lutheran church, he knew he had to alter the one spiritual power that could have stopped him. In response, the minority in Germany opposed Hitler through the Confessing Church, led by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He and others paid with their lives for opposing the regime, but

they are heroes of the true faith. Some Catholic priests also resisted and were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem is a vivid reminder of what happened under the Nazi regime. This unique series of buildings features modern architecture and haunting displays. Like the Holocaust museum in Washington, D.C., it shows the early twentieth century movement called eugenics and how this contributed to racial theories (birthed in evolutionary theory). Also on the grounds of the museum is the avenue of the righteous, where trees are planted in memory of righteous Gentiles who helped the Jews in their darkest hour—names like Oskar Schindler and Corrie Ten Boom appear there.

Is there today a similar conspiracy threatening the very fabric of civilization? Yes, there is much evidence for that. It is not necessarily an organized human effort, but Satan has made much progress through his works of deception in society. He has used self-interest to often work against spiritual principles. A great example is abortion. Women obtained legal sanction to put their convenience above their unborn human life and that opened the floodgates. Prayer in school was replaced by sex education in the schools since the 1960's. (While sex education is not new, it became a tool for the liberal social agenda.)

Whole sections of the church have been neutralized by liberalism and thus will not take a stand against abortion, homosexuality and other liberal issues. The same ones who gave up on the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures in the fifties and sixties have been deceived by political correctness.

Multiculturalism has eroded our school systems and now threatens the security of our nation. Universities have become propaganda mills for liberalism, globalism, and socialism. It is safe to say that half our nation no longer knows how capitalism, our traditional economy, works.

In the process, America's historical heritage has been lost. College graduates no longer know the Founding Fathers and the principles that made this nation great. The Judeo-Christian value system that once gave us a common cultural framework has been replaced by globalism. Even in the legal system, it is often suggested that we use international law as our reference point rather than our own Constitution or Judeo-Christian values. Even the President has recently said we are not a "Christian nation". Well, in one sense, there is no state church. But what do you call a nation with 80-85% of its people professing one faith? Certainly we are a Christian people.

Anyone who wants to turn this tide back towards traditional values is typically labeled with several reactionary terms: right wing, bigot, xenophobic, homophobic and so on. Focus is often shifted away from the arguments themselves by these emotional labels.

Then there is terrorism. Through modern explosives and weapons of mass destruction, the world can now be held hostage by terrorists and their various demands. This is complicated by the oil rich states in the Middle East. They can also make demands on the western world by controlling the supply of oil. Anyone who disagrees that Islam is a "religion of peace" or that it is a legitimate alternative to the Judeo-Christian value system is labeled "Islamophobic". For example, those who objected to a mosque being built at Ground Zero, were labeled this way. No we're not afraid of them (phobic), we're just pointing out what history has proven many of them to be. And it is not just a lunatic fringe of Muslims who believe in violent Jihad. There are vast groups of clerics, mosques and Islamic groups around the world who believe this is the true Islam, to struggle against the West and destroy Judeo-Christian civilization.

While there may be some moderate Muslims in the west, they are helpless against this tide of terror. Those who oppose the radicals are usually punished or assassinated. But ultimately, they

will fail, just as others through history have failed. This brings us to one of the great stories of the Old Testament, the story of Esther.

Esther 4: 13, 14

Do not think that if you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?

8: 5-11

"If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman...devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people?

The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them...

9: 21-22

Mordecai...sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned to joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Related Reading- Esther and Ruth

Chapter Eleven

Esther and Heroines of Old

“Hitler reminds me of Haman and my namesake from the Old Testament,” remarked Esther.

“Yes,” replied Matt, “there have always been the Hamans, Herods, Hitlers and Husseins who have opposed the purposes of God.”

“Interesting that they all start with H. Are you going to tell the story of Esther?”

“Yes, Dear. Now is as good a time as any!”

God has always had his “secret” weapons, in the form of godly women. As Matt reread the book of Esther, he was surprised to learn that her Hebrew name was Hadassah (myrtle). Her Persian name Esther, is believed to come from the Persian word for star. And she certainly was a star, a beauty queen of the time.

The setting is during the season after the Babylonian captivity. While many Hebrews had returned to Judea fifty years earlier, many exiles stayed after Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persian empire. So the king in this story is the Persian King Ahaseurus (Xerxes) around 479 B.C. A large Jewish community stayed in the cities of Persia and their existence is put in jeopardy by the antagonist of the story, Haman. Haman did not just hate the Jews for personal reasons. He is descended from the Amalekites, Israel’s age old enemies (Amalek was a son of Esau who carried on the enmity between Jacob and Esau). Amalekites had also been deported from Canaan to Persia.

Now the king is displeased with his wife, Queen Vashti. He decides to hold a beauty contest through the realm and select a

replacement for her. Esther is selected first to be part of the harem. When her turn came to go to the king, he was more pleased with her than any other women and selected her to be queen. He threw a great banquet in honor of her. All this time Esther, under instructions from her Uncle Mordecai who had raised her, had not brought up her Jewish ancestry.

Meanwhile, Mordecai uncovered a conspiracy and saved the king's life. Next we are introduced to Haman, who is a rising star in the court of Xerxes. Haman cannot stand the fact that Mordecai does not kneel down to him as other nobles do. This is probably a result of Mordecai's faith in God, rather than in political correctness. To get even, Haman determines to not only destroy Mordecai, but his people the Jews.

Haman portrays the Jews as troublesome people who will not assimilate and obey the king's laws, thus deceiving the king into giving him authority to dispose of the Jews. Haman and the other nobles cast the lot (pur) to determine the date on which these enemies should be destroyed. The lot is cast in the first month and falls on the twelfth month, giving a few months for the Jews to react. Thus the Jews had this death sentence hanging over them for months.

This reminds us of the Nuremberg Laws which made it official German policy to persecute the Jews of Germany. This should have been seen as the precursor of worse things to come.

The Jews of Persia entered a period of mourning in sackcloth because of what was about to happen. Esther instructs a eunuch to contact Mordecai and find out what is wrong. But Mordecai appeals to Esther to help him save their people. She is reluctant at first because she cannot just go see the king whenever she wants. Mordecai appeals to her with these famous words: *Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you*

*and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*⁶⁵

At Mordecai's insistence she decides to go. The king does extend the gold scepter to her and listens to her request. She asks for a banquet with Haman as guest. The plot thickens! Providentially, the king is reminded that night of Mordecai's kindness to him and decides to honor him. Haman comes the next day thinking he will be honored by the queen, not knowing what is about to happen. Meanwhile, Haman is humiliated having to honor Mordecai for the kindness he had done for king earlier.

When Haman arrives for the banquet, the king asks what Esther's request is and she asks for the lives of her people to be spared. When the king asks who is the man who would have them killed she says "the adversary and enemy is this vile Haman?" Haman is caught in his own trap and is hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai.

The king then grants an edict that the Jews could defend themselves on the appointed day of destruction and the plot is foiled! Mordecai is honored, the Jews are saved and there is great rejoicing. From that time on the feast of Purim was celebrated to commemorate this deliverance. Also, ten sons of Haman were hanged on the gallows (9:13). Some have seen history repeat itself in the hanging of ten Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg, the home of Nazism, on October 16, 1946.

So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim...to establish these days of Purim at their designated times.⁶⁶

Esther stands in a long line of dedicated women of God throughout the Old Testament. Miriam, the sister of Moses;

⁶⁵ Esther 4:13,14

⁶⁶ Esther 9:29

Deborah the Judge; Ruth, the grandmother of David; Rahab, the harlot who helped the spies at Jericho; and other similar women of courage.

“Speaking of Ruth,” Esther said, “I love her story of faithfulness.”

“Yes, Honey,” recalled Matt, “she was a woman who was faithful to her widowed mother-in-law, wasn’t she.”

“Yes, it’s a heart-rending story. Naomi and her husband and two sons moved to Moab because of a famine in Israel. That was back in the time of the Judges,” Esther related the account.

“Naomi’s husband died and her two sons married Moabite women. In a few years both of the sons died, leaving three women with no men to care for them. Naomi decided to return to Israel. She encouraged her two daughters-in-law to return to their villages and hopefully find husbands. But Ruth refused and pledged to stay with Naomi. Perhaps she had come to love the God of Israel as well as Naomi, because she answered Naomi with these words:

Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Ruth 1:16

“Isn’t that a great example for us all,” commented Matt.

“And guess where Naomi and Ruth returned to?”

“I forget,” admitted Matt.

“Bethlehem! That was Naomi’s town! And while there, Ruth met Boaz, and married into the royal line of Christ. She became David’s grandmother!” The words came gushing out as Esther thought how amazing God’s ways are.

“Yes, you’re right. We’ve got to include this story.”

And the next day they went to Bethlehem to see the oldest church in the Holy Land, the Church of the Nativity, on or close to the site where Jesus was born. In preparation, Matt looked up the reference in Micah 5:2:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

The Land

It's time to talk about the Land of Israel. It is the crossroads of the world, and a land of conflict. But it is a land given by God to Israel. It is the only piece of real estate on the face of the earth that came with that kind of title deed. Originally, God granted the land to Abraham and his descendants (Gen.17:8). Then, God said to Moses, that he was giving the Israelites the land, but that they would have to take possession of it and root out the disobedient and degenerate heathen societies that lived there. God had actually given the Canaanites four hundred years to repent and they only grew worse (Gen. 15:16).

This all began with a conquest under Joshua in which God was “giving them the land”. They were to be faithful to Yahweh and be good stewards of the land He gave them. Yet, they often fell into idolatry and caused God to punish them. So after a great kingdom period under David and Solomon, the people fell into idolatry which led to being expelled from the land a few centuries later (to Babylon). However, God promised Judah that after their punishment of seventy years, they would return to the land. God



fulfilled that promise and they had another season of growth and inhabiting the land in preparation for the coming of Messiah. During this season they did not succumb to idolatry. There were various political entities in control, and times of unrest and outside interference, but they generally stayed true to the covenant for four hundred years. Then came the birth, and the life of Christ.

Jesus foresaw that due to their rejection of him, a judgment lasting until modern times would fall on them.⁶⁷ They were to be scattered again and Jerusalem trampled on by the Gentiles “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luke 21:20-24. Here is the text:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be a great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Imagine Jesus’ grief for his people and the holy city when he pronounces this judgment. It’s as if he were seeing the events in the future as they were actually happening. All this destruction would take place just forty years later, exactly as he foretold. The Jews were driven out of the land in the first century. They began to return to Palestine in 1917, but did not have a nation until 1948 when the UN recognized their need for a homeland. But the foreign occupation of old Jerusalem lasted until 1967! Despite the UN establishment of the modern state in 1948, the Israelis have had to fight for their existence against wars, riots, and acts of terrorism ever since. Even though they were not given the entire land that they used to possess, they have been pressured to give

⁶⁷ Lk. 19:41-44 records how Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

back East Jerusalem and all the other territories conquered in wars that were perpetrated against them.

The Mountains of Israel

“Hey, Matt, don’t you love that ‘mountains’ teaching by Dr. Hayford?”

“Yes, that would fit nicely here,” replied Matt. “And now that we’ve been around most of the country, it all makes more sense to me.”

During most of the events of the Bible, there were several key mountains around which events centered. Matt knew that Jack Hayford and others had great teachings around this theme.

First, Mount Sinai, site of the Burning Bush and later the giving of the Law of Moses. This mountain was located somewhere either in the Sinai Peninsula (a traditional site) or east of the Gulf of Aqaba. This mountain stands for God’s holiness and our sin..

Then, Mount Carmel where Elijah faced off against the prophets of Baal. This is on the coast in the northwest part of the country. This mountain teaches dedication to the One true God.

Then Mount Zion, generally the site of Jerusalem and the temple. More about that in a moment. This mountain stands for worship.

Jesus’ ministry included mountains in the north where he taught and where he was transfigured. Many people have identified a mountain on the north shore of Galilee and the site of the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. Perhaps Mount Hermon is the site of the Transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17, where it is connected with the area of Caesarea Philippi nearby. (Tradition also claims another mountain southwest of the Sea of

Galilee as the possible site.) At any rate, these mountains stand for discipleship.



Mount Hermon

Jesus often spent time on Mount Zion (Jerusalem) for the feasts, but spent his last week there confronting the Pharisees and religious leaders. It was just outside the old city wall where he was crucified on a little hill that is often called Mount Calvary. (Golgotha: The Place of Skull) Actually, Calvary and the temple mount are part of a ridge that used to be called Mount Moriah,⁶⁸ the site of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac almost four millennia ago. Calvary (Moriah) represents atonement.

Finally, the Mount of Olives to the east of the city is noted for several key events. First, Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was from Bethany, just over the crest of this mount. On the western slope the place where he wept is marked by churches and viewing areas where pilgrims can gaze at the city much as he did.

Today, one can still look east from Zion toward the Mount of Olives. At the base of this mount is the Garden of Gethsemane

⁶⁸ Genesis 22:2

where Jesus prayed all night before his arrest. At the top is where he ascended to heaven forty days after his resurrection. And that is also where he will return at the end of time for his Second Coming. It is the mountain of victory! Zechariah predicts this in his final chapter:

Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south... Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

(Zech. 14:3-5)

And so the “mountains” teaching takes in the whole scope of God’s plan; from Abraham, to Moses, to Christ. Of course, the ultimate Mount Zion will be the heavenly city of Jerusalem where we dwell with the Lord for ever and ever.

Ezra 1:1-8, 11

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and put it in writing:

“This is what the king of Persia says: ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’

Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. Moreover King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer...who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah... In all there were 5400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along when the exiles came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Related Reading- Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah

Chapter Twelve

Rebuilding After the Exile: Powerful Partners

How does a nation that has been ruined and practically wiped off the map get rebuilt? Certainly it was a process for Judah after the Exile. There were powerful partnerships over a hundred year period, from 536 to 420 B.C.

First of all, there were secular rulers who showed favor. Cyrus the Persian (prophesied by Isaiah) gave permission for the exiles to return home in 536. Then, in 445, Artaxerxes issued a decree that subject peoples could rebuild walls and cities. This led to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, prophesied by Daniel.

In the first phase, Zerubbabel the governor was helped by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1). This was completed in 516, though it was only a shadow of the splendor of Solomon's temple. The next eighty years saw the rebirth of worship with the remnant of 40,000 men (90,000 total) who returned in the first phase.

Ezra himself came with a group of about 5,000 in 458, as recorded in his book chapters 7-10. Ezra also brought some reforms to the reborn nation. This reminds us that spiritual reform and renewal must precede physical rebuilding of a society. Ezra would partner with Nehemiah.

The Second Temple

The unthinkable had happened! The very center of the worship of God's people had been destroyed. No longer could

there be sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people or the nation. "For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."⁶⁹ How could sincere Jews handle this dilemma? Pray for forgiveness? Try to do God's work?

Yahweh had become so angry with Judah's idolatry that he had withdrawn his presence. First the northern kingdom had fallen in 722, never to return. Then came the fall of Judah in 586. Seventy years of captivity had been decreed by Jeremiah. It is interesting that the first exiles were taken in 605 and the first return was seventy years later. Also, the temple that had been destroyed in 586 was rebuilt by 516. So it was seventy years either way.

The returning group was called the Remnant, representing only a small percentage of the millions who had been killed or exiled. Nevertheless, God was willing to start over with the Remnant that had come through fire and blood. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah cheered the people on during these twenty years of rebuilding their sacred house.

When the temple was completed and rededicated, there were two reactions. One was sadness that this building was nothing like the glory of Solomon's temple. Second, that they could once again worship Yahweh.

Sacrifices were resumed in 516 and a few years later, Ezra brought more silver and gold back from Babylon with his group to beautify the temple. Haggai had prophesied that the glory of the latter house would be greater than the former house (2:9). This was only partially fulfilled in the next few centuries. But the true Glory came five hundred years later when Jesus entered the second temple during his ministry on earth!

⁶⁹ Hebrews 9:22

Zechariah's Amazing Prophecies

As we said before, Zechariah partnered with Haggai and Zerubbabel in the national restoration of Israel around 516 B.C., particularly the rebuilding of the temple. He is the most messianic of the so called “minor prophets”. Though his prophecy is shorter than the major prophets, we should not miss the significance of his amazing messages.

The rebuilding of the temple by the returning Exiles had stalled and God used Zechariah to light the fire under them- a fire of empowerment and encouragement. Here are some key themes:

Eight visions in the early chapters point to God’s plan:

- To be merciful to Jerusalem (ch. 1)
- Cast out enemies (ch. 2)
- Put a wall of fire around Jerusalem (ch. 2)
- Bring the Messiah (the righteous Branch) to save them (ch. 3)
- Empower them with the Spirit (ch. 4)
- Curse dishonesty (ch. 5)
- Remove wickedness (ch. 5)
- Execute judgment on the whole earth (ch. 6)

In the process of giving these comforting words, God also speaks of his zeal for Jerusalem; calling the Jews the apple of his eye (2:8), cleansing the high priest Joshua, and endorsing the work of Zerubbabel the governor.

In the sixth chapter the messianic element is mixed with God’s crowning of Joshua the high priest. It was unusual for the mixing of the priesthood with the kingship, but this was prophetic of the King Priest Yeshua who was coming. While some of this

refers to the earthly rule and temporal crown of Joshua, there is more to it.

Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two. (6:12,13)

This was indicating that the coming Messiah would be both priest and king. He would also build a temple of his own (the body of Christ). Few people realize that the same root word for branch (*nezer*) is the root of Nazareth, or Nazarene. Matthew⁷⁰ indicates that Jesus being raised in Nazareth is a fulfillment of prophecy. This must be the one referred to, because there is no other.

Josephus adds an interesting story about Zerubbabel's origin. He was a bodyguard to Darius the King of Persia. In a contest with two other bodyguards, he gave wise counsel about what is strongest: wine, kings, women or truth? He answered that even though the first three are strong, truth is strongest of all, because it comes from God and is eternal. Mr. Z won the contest and Darius decided to grant him a request. Mr. Z asked for permission to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. He organized the expedition of nearly 90,000 returning exiles.

Just then, Esther cast a glance at Matt's desk. "I knew it wouldn't be long till you had your buddy Josephus out."

"Yes, you know how much I like to refer to his work."

"It is cool to have an independent first century source aside from the Old Testament."

"Yes, he represents some of the folklore and oral teaching of first century Israel, as well as accounts from the Scriptures."

⁷⁰ Matthew 2:23

“And doesn’t he also refer to Jesus and John the Baptist?”

“Yes,” affirmed Matt, “and he explains how they contributed to the first century milieu leading up to the Jewish revolt against Rome.”

“And here’s an exciting verse from Zechariah chapter eight about God’s love for Jerusalem:

This is what the Lord almighty says: “I am very zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her... and I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain. (NKJV)⁷¹

Esther exclaimed, “Hey, that’s the lyric from Paul’s new song from Desert Rain!”⁷²

“Yes, that was the first song in the concert the other night at the Dead Sea.” They both reflected on how powerful it had been to gather at Ein Gedi, the oasis where David once stayed next to the Dead Sea. They had come there with five thousand believers who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

“Who would have thought there would be so many messianic believers today, and so many Christians supporting events like that,” added Esther.

“You’re right. Nothing like music to make these prophecies come alive!” exclaimed Matt.

The scope of Judah’s future and final days appears in the next six chapters of Zechariah:

⁷¹ Zechariah 8:3

⁷² Zealous Over Zion by Ted Pearce and Paul Wilbur. This concert was recorded by Integrity Music in October, 2009.

9:9- The coming of Zion's king riding on a donkey.

10-12- Restoration, Desolation and Deliverance.

This prophecy looks beyond the first century destruction to last days events. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced and mourn." The cycle of Jerusalem's rescue and a revival among the Jews reminds us of a coming acceptance of the pierced Messiah.

13- A fountain of cleansing is opened for the house of David. This relates to Christ being the ultimate atonement for Israel.

14- The ultimate day of the Lord. The nations gather to Jerusalem for judgment. The Lord himself comes and sets foot on the Mount of Olives. The mountain will split in two and a new river will flow forth. Jesus ascended from this mountain and angels appeared proclaiming that he would come again in the same manner.

While all the events in these chapters may not be in chronological order, they do follow a general pattern. There are glimpses of the Lord appearing in the sky for final rescue of Israel and judgment of the nations (9:14), mixed with the re-gathering of Israel from the nations (10:8-12), and the impervious Jerusalem in the last days (12:2-9).

What can we take away from this? Though many come against Jerusalem and God's people in the last days, He will defend them and in fact bring revival. All this will be in preparation for the final return of the Lord, when he splits the Mount of Olives and comes to Jerusalem to reign. Together the Lord's people will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for ever and everything in Jerusalem will be holy. This looks forward in Jewish terminology to what we Christians know of as the consummation of Christ's kingdom. Hallelujah!

Esther broke in on his thoughts, “Matt, how do you think the Jewish people will come to Jesus?”

“Well, Esther,” he replied, “I’ve been thinking about the whole idea of revival. If we are in the last days, then maybe the next revival we’ll see is a Jewish one. There have been many among Gentile nations; and it is said that there are revivals in 3rd world countries such as Africa, or further developed countries such as Russia and China. But perhaps there is one happening right now among the Jews.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Consider that thirty years ago there were almost no Jewish messianic believers. Yet there have thousands come to Yeshua as Messiah in these last decades. There is a resurgence of messianic congregations, publications and even worship music.”

“Yes,” added Esther, “and there is a lot more than even what we see. The association of messianic congregations is growing all the time and there are more messianic congregations in Israel.”

“Not only are there more, but there are an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 messianic believers around the world today,” said Matt.

“That reminds me of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses in Revelation.”

“That may be no coincidence Esther, if we are really in the last days. And if the Jews are coming in significant numbers, that might trigger a Gentile revival as well!”

“Isn’t that what happened in the first century, Matt? The Jews first and then the Greeks?”

“You’re exactly right Esther!”

“And remember earlier you wrote about David’s tabernacle being restored and how that would reach to the Gentiles?”

“Esther, if you’re right, then we had better support what God has doing in the recent messianic movement and in Israel.”

Matt was struck at how profound this thought was. Perhaps American Christians had been looking in the wrong place for revival.

Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls and City

A few years after Ezra’s return, Nehemiah was a cupbearer in the court of Artaxerxes. His heart was heavy with concern for his native country. One day the king asked about his heavy heart and Nehemiah told him of his home city in ruins and distress from surrounding tribes.

Esther Burns interrupted his flow of thought. “Did you say Artaxerxes? Wasn’t that Esther’s husband?”

“Well, many think Xerxes was Esther’s husband,” answered Matt. “But Xerxes’ son Artaxerxes was the next ruler and Esther may still have been in the court. Artaxerxes extended his favor to Nehemiah and, though she is not named, one wonders if Queen Esther was still on the throne. Regardless, Ezra or Nehemiah had recorded her exploits in the book we know of as Esther.”

In fact, Nehemiah chapter two mentions that the queen was sitting next to Artaxerxes when the conversation took place. The queen may be another reason why Artaxerxes was sympathetic toward the Jews. Also, why mention this detail unless it is someone already familiar to the readers?

When Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem, he became the leader he was meant to be. He followed four principles that are good for any leader: Compassion, Cooperation, Confidence from God's word, and Courage in the face of opposition. He assigned portions of the wall, from gate to gate, for groups of the people to be responsible for. By the way, twelve gates are mentioned in the book and this is always one of God's numbers for completion; twelve tribes, twelve apostles, etc.

Nehemiah's Religious Reforms

Chapter eight of this book is a turning point. The walls have been rebuilt and the people are once again secure. Ezra commands that the Law be brought out and read to the people. While the people are convicted of their sin as they hear it read throughout the morning, Nehemiah commands them to celebrate, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." And so they had a feast.

It wasn't long before the people, with Ezra's encouragement, realized it was the season of the Feast of Tabernacles. They heard the command in the Law that they should build booths and live in them during the period of the feast, to commemorate their wandering in the wilderness. So they proceeded to collect branches and build their booths. They celebrated with great joy because they were once again back in their land and were living in obedience to God's commands.

The lesson here seems to be that returning to the Word of God and practicing his commands are a source of great joy. So in the New Covenant, what kind of obedience could bring this joy to God's people? Many churches, of course, will do special services around the seasons of Christmas and Easter. This often involves pageants and concerts and a series of events, not just one service. The season of advent, while considered too denominational by some, provides structure and anticipation for the month of December for others.

The Easter season usually is celebrated for at least a week, beginning with Palm Sunday, recognizing Good Friday, and of course, Resurrection Sunday. Another modification which reminds us of our Hebrew roots is to celebrate a Passover Meal on Thursday night that week. This is the background of the Last Supper, but also gives folks a chance to see the prophetic significance of the Passover Feast, pointing forward to the true Lamb of God, Jesus himself.

A return to celebrating fall feasts provides a third season of the year for believers today. These feasts are Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. The fall feasts look forward to God's ultimate redemption in the second coming of Christ. By celebrating these God appointed feasts, believers go through a regular cycle of repentance and rejoicing. These can be fun, and need not be legalistic, which Paul warns about in Colossians 2:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (v. 16, 17)

It could be argued that to fully appreciate the reality in Christ, we do need some knowledge of the feasts and their significance. We should look at them as reasons to celebrate, not legalistic observances.

In chapter ten, Nehemiah and the people enter into a fresh covenant and pledge not to let their daughters intermarry with people of the land, to restore the tithe, and not to neglect



the house of God, among other admonitions.

Malachi 1: 1-11

An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the LORD.

“But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.”

But this is what the LORD Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!’

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty. “It is you, O priest, who show contempt for my name.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’

“You place defiled food on my altar.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ ...

“Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD, “and I will accept no offering from your hands. My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.

Related Reading- Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Chapter Thirteen

Malachi and the Silent Years

Malachi is the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament. Just as the other prophets proclaim that the Messiah is coming, Malachi amplifies that promise. Amidst some practical preaching against the sins of the people in his day, there is the great promise of the One who is coming.

The year is about 420. The exiles are rebuilding their nation. The walls are now complete and Jerusalem is once again secure. The sacrificial system is in place. But the people have become lax in some areas. God uses Malachi to call them to repentance. It is a sad commentary on human nature. They are going through the motions, but not really honoring their heavenly Father. The priests are failing as well as the people. The book is a dialogue between God and the people, as He exposes their excuses.

Malachi means “my messenger”, and the messenger theme prevails in the book. Nehemiah had returned to Persia by this time, and God raised up Malachi as His messenger to guide the people. They did not yet see the glory of Israel restored and may have questioned God’s promises of love (Ch. 1). But they had also brought blemished sacrifices instead of pure ones, and that revealed their own heart problems. They were also being unfaithful by intermarrying with pagan people and not bringing their tithes into the storehouse.

Moreover, the priests had not been faithful. They were not honoring God above all (2:2) and were not doing their job of preserving knowledge and instructing the people (2:7).

After two chapters of dealing with their sins, the third and fourth chapters contain promises. Chapter 3 speaks of the messenger of the covenant:

“See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap... He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.⁷³

It is not hard to picture Christ coming into the temple to cleanse it as a fulfillment of this prophecy! Ironically, Christ would bring about a new priesthood, the priesthood not of Levites, but of all believers- I Pet. 2:9. Although, it could be said that those who minister in the body of Christ in any form of worship are Levites. In our church we have deacons, and those who prepare communion, those who play instruments, lead worship, add technical support, dance, and usher.

Michael Brown, a messianic Jew, writes in his book about Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus about this verse:

According to the famous medieval Jewish commentaries of Radak and Metsudat David, “the LORD” refers to none other than King Messiah.” However neither of these commentators took sufficient note of the fact that the Messiah was to come to the Temple that stood in Malachi’s day. I ask you, did this happen? If it did, then the Messiah must have come before the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.; if not, God’s word has failed.⁷⁴

Considering Daniel and Malachi’s prophecies together, Brown summarizes:

The Hebrew Scriptures teach that while the Second Temple was standing, there would be a divine visitation to that Temple of great import, bringing purification and judgment. Sin would be

⁷³ Malachi 3:1-3

⁷⁴ Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2000, Pg. 77

*atoned for and everlasting righteousness ushered in, and the events associated with this Second Temple would be so great that its glory would surpass that of the glorious First Temple. If the Messiah, the Son of God, did not come and visit the Temple, if he did not pay for our sins and establish a new way of righteousness, if he did not bring the glory of God to the house of God, if his coming did not purify and purge the Jewish people in his generation, then how were these prophecies fulfilled? What divine visitation did take place if not for the coming of the Messiah? When else did God visit the Second Temple in a personal way?*⁷⁵

Back to Malachi: Chapter four contains the beautiful promise:

*But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.*⁷⁶

Jesus is pictured as the brightness of the sun, signifying the dawning of a new day! The message here is not so much about him being the son of God as being the beginning of a new season of life. Accordingly, after the four hundred silent years, God's power bursts forth on the earth in the birth of his Son! This is where the next pages of the Bible, the gospels, continue the story. The great hymn *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* captures this in the verse that says "Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace, Hail the Sun of Righteousness, light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in his wings!"⁷⁷ Thus, the Old Testament ends on a very expectant note.

"I never knew that phrase was from Malachi. Hey, isn't there a verse about tithing in Malachi?" asked Esther.

"Yes, it is 3:10," answered Matt, "'bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and see what a blessing God will give you'.

⁷⁵ Ibid, Pg.80

⁷⁶ Malachi 4:2

⁷⁷ Charles Wesley

I'm paraphrasing a little. That's an important principle, to recognize what already belongs to God. Otherwise, we are robbing Him by failing to give him the honor due. I always encourage believers to give by faith and move toward the tithe as quickly as possible. Also, it is important to note that we are to bring the tithe to the storehouse, that is, the local church where we are fed."

Esther added, "Wasn't there a teaching about the storehouse?"

"Yes," replied Matt. "The storehouse is the place where you receive your spiritual food. In Israel it was the temple, and it also provided food for the priests and Levites. I believe that's a spiritual principle. Much as we like to give to various ministries, our first responsibility is to the local congregation."

"Yes," Esther added, "it wouldn't make much sense to support a lot of other ministries and starve out the local church that is the frontline of ministry in the community. Our local pastor is the one we look to for guidance and teaching."

"Yes, and the rest of the church staff as well, not to mention the ongoing need for facilities."

The Not So Silent Years

"The Silent Years- what does that mean?" asked Esther as she looked over Matt's shoulder.

"Well, it's an interesting term. It refers primarily to God's prophetic word. Malachi was the last prophet until Christ came four hundred years later."

"Wow, that's a long time without a prophet," mused Esther.

“Yes, but they had the entire Old Testament available to them by this time, so they had a lot of revelation to guide them,” answered Matt.

“What else was happening in Jewish history?”

“Well, it certainly wasn’t uneventful. Various empires continued to rise and fall. Some dominated Israel and others allowed her to have peace.”

Matt saw that the era divided itself into four distinct phases:

The Persian Period- 450-330 B.C.

The Hellenistic (Greek) Period- 330-166 B.C.

The Hasmonean Period of Independence- 166-63 B.C.

The Roman Period- 63 B.C. - Birth of Christ

The Greek Period- Alexander the Great



Around the year 332 Alexander had been conquering the world and stopped in the eastern Mediterranean area. He first conquered Tyre in a seven month siege. Then, he turned his sights

on Jerusalem. The records are clear that he destroyed Tyre and that he did not destroy Jerusalem. Why?

The first century Jewish historian Josephus answers the question with a very interesting story. As he retells the story of his people, this is what he has to say about Alexander and the High Priest Jaddua.

As the Jews anticipated the arrival of the Greek army, Jaddua had a vision. He saw himself and the people going out to meet the Macedonians. So the next day, he and all the priests dressed in their priestly garments, and he in the special High Priest's hat with a golden crown on it. Jaddua and the priests led the people out of the city to welcome Alexander. When Alexander saw the people streaming out of the city, he had a strange reaction. He greeted the High Priest and said that this was the very thing he had seen in a dream!

Jaddua showed Alexander the city and helped him sacrifice in the temple. (We would assume that he only entered the court of the Gentiles.) Then he showed Alexander the prophecy of Daniel that foretold his coming!⁷⁸ Alexander was so impressed that he gave the Jews a discount in their tribute payments. Then he turned eastward to continue his campaigns against Persia and India.⁷⁹

Daniel 11:3,4 had foretold the coming of this king from Greece, and also that upon his death, the kingdom would be divided among four generals. The rest of that chapter speaks of other battles that accurately describe the events of a two hundred year period, including the rivalry of the Ptolemies of Egypt with the Seleucids of Syria.

Josephus reflects a first century respect for Daniel's prophecies that does not seem to be found in Judaism in the last

⁷⁸ Daniel 8:5,21

⁷⁹ Paul Maier, *Josephus: The Essential Writings*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1988, p. 199.

few centuries. Perhaps this is because the messianic passages are too convicting. This seems to be similar to the treatment of Isaiah.

Ptolemy of Egypt and the Septuagint

During the rest of the Hellenistic period, Judah was heavily influenced by Greek thought and language, as were the surrounding nations. Ptolemy of Egypt expressed a great respect toward Judaism and learning in general, and founded a great library at Alexandria. In addition, there was a large community of Jewish exiles there, part of what was known as the Disapora (scattering) of the Jews. There may have been 120,000 Jews in that city.

Ptolemy sent a letter to Jerusalem around 250 B.C. inviting the Jews to send representatives from the twelve tribes to create a Greek translation of the Old Testament for his library. Here is the copy recorded in Josephus:

I have decided to have your Law translated into Greek and deposited in my library. You will do well, therefore, to select from each tribe six men of good character. They should be mature, knowledgeable about the laws, and able to make an accurate translation.⁸⁰

And so, approximately seventy scholars traveled to Alexandria for several months to do the work of translation. Thus was produced the Septuagint (Greek for Seventy), a very important pre- Christian work that verifies the Old Testament text. It also contained the same books we have in the Old Testament to this day, although some are listed in different categories and order.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 201

The Syrian Interlude and the Story of Hanukkah



While the story of Hanukkah ends happily, the beginning is one of the worst periods in Israel's history. During this time Israel was caught in the middle of an Egyptian/Syrian rivalry. The Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes desired to conquer Egypt and Israel. He was the boldest and most Hellenized of these kings, desiring to wipe out other religions. The title which he took for himself was Epiphanes- God Manifest; not a good omen. In 168 BC, as his troops marauded through Israel, they were instructed to stop the temple worship and make people sacrifice to Zeus in local towns. In the temple they erected a statue of Zeus and sacrificed a pig- an "*abomination of desolation*".⁸¹ (This became the prophetic type of what many people expect the antichrist to do when he comes on the scene.)

The Jews were unable to resist all this at first and those who did were killed. But one day an older patriot named Mattathias, in the town of Modin, resisted this idolatry. He pretended to bring his sacrifice, pulled out a dagger, and killed the Syrian official and a local man who had sacrificed to Zeus. This started a revolt called the Maccabean Revolt. Mattathias and his

⁸¹ Daniel 11:31

five sons fled to the desert and began rallying the Jewish people against these outrages. After a year of fighting, Mattathias became ill. He appointed his sons Simon as advisor and Maccabeus (Judas) as commander.

After several campaigns against the Syrians, the rebels drove them out of the country. Then Judas took control of Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. This happened three years to the day after Antiochus had defiled it. They celebrated the re-consecration for eight days. But when they captured the temple there was only one day's supply of consecrated oil for the lampstand in the Holy Place. However the lamp kept burning for eight days while they consecrated more oil. This is known as the miracle of Hanukkah-the Festival of Lights.

The country gained a measure of independence under the Maccabee brothers, though there was more fighting and intrigue during this hundred year period. John Hyrcanus was also an outstanding leader of the Jews who became both high priest and governor. But in 63 B.C., the Romans conquered the Middle east under Pompey.

By this time there were two leading religious parties in Jerusalem, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees party tended to be more liberal and was the party of the wealthy leaders of the nation who were not opposed to Hellenism. The Pharisees were more zealous for the law and purity of the Jewish nation. They became very influential at this time, which they still were when Christ came on the scene.

An Idumean politician named Herod purchased the throne from Rome around 40 B.C. He was approved by both Marc Antony and Octavian Caesar. He became known as Herod the Great. From that time he became a ruthless leader in Judea and began several great building projects.

Chapter Fourteen

The Stage is Set:

Herod the Builder

Herod built the port of Caesarea as a Roman type city, complete with his palace, an amphitheater, and a circus for racing. Matt and Esther enjoyed their tour of the ruins at Caesarea. The remains of Herod's palace and even his swimming pool are still visible. They walked through the amphitheater built by Herod, which has been excavated in the last fifty years. Nearby the excavations is a beautiful Roman aqueduct, built by the Roman Tenth legion under Herod's supervision, which brought water from the northern mountains to Herod's city. This also demonstrated Herod's power and his favor with the Romans at this time. He built several other palace/fortresses around the country and a magnificent one in Jerusalem on the western hill. Then he set about remodeling the temple. In conjunction with the priests, huge stones were laid in the temple platform that are still there today. Then he had the stones prepared for the temple itself and they were assembled on the site in a year and a half. He added 162 Corinthian columns to porticoes around the temple courts. These columns and the roofs they supported were 37 feet high. The temple was dedicated in about 17 B.C., just in time for the true King to come "suddenly to his temple" a few years later. The temple platform as it had been enlarged by Herod is still there today. While the first century buildings are gone, the platform is essentially unchanged. When the Romans destroyed the buildings, they scraped the platform clean and pushed stones off the top. The first Muslim mosque was built in the late six hundreds.



Model of Herod's Temple

There is an old first century street that has been excavated at the southwestern corner of the temple mount since 1969. The temple, of course, was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. But, there are actual piles of stones down on the first century street as a silent witness to the destruction. One of these stones is inscribed with “The place of trumpeting” which was the place up on top where the shofars had called the people to worship. While the Muslims have built the Dome of the Rock on the topmost platform, there is still evidence even there of the place where the ark sat on the Foundation Stone!⁸²

⁸² See Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, Harvest House, 1997, pgs. 214-217



The “Trumpeting Stone” at Base of Temple Mount

Herod the Butcher

Unfortunately, Herod had the characteristics of a megalomaniac and was paranoid of anyone who threatened his power. During his reign he had a wife and several sons put to death. It is reported that Caesar once said, “it is better to be Herod’s pig than to be his son.” He had thousands of Jews killed for various reasons. We know these things from Josephus. So it should not surprise us that when Magi came from the east, he pretended to be interested in worshiping the new “King”, but in reality wanted to snuff him out.

One of Herod’s last actions was to order the death of all the boys under two in the town of Bethlehem. Matthew tells us how Joseph was warned and escaped with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. He also tells us that this slaughter was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy that Rachel would be weeping for her children (Jer. 31:15). Rachel, one of the mothers of Israel, died giving birth to Benjamin. So she became a type of all who sacrificed for God’s purposes. While the death of Rachel for her son was not in vain,

neither was the death of the infants of Bethlehem. They could be considered the first of many martyrs for Christ's sake.

This kind of event is part of the tragedy of human free will. God allows men a certain degree of autonomy, yet there is often suffering as a result. While God spoke to Joseph and Mary about fleeing with the baby Jesus, there was still a price to be paid for Herod's treachery. Perhaps a dozen to twenty innocent children were killed (Matt. 2:16-18). Perhaps Herod (and his sons) hoped that he had destroyed the threat to his throne and ceased searching as a result.

At any rate, Herod was dead by a horrible disease in a few months. God's justice did not sleep long. But the time came when the holy family could return and God led them to settle in Nazareth, where Jesus could grow up safely in obscurity until the time came for his ministry. Herod was known to have spies who would stoop to informing for money. While he knew where the child had been born, he did not know Joseph and Mary or their hometown.

This kind of cruelty and injustice always frustrates us because it is hard to understand. Someday we'll realize that all the pain and suffering was somehow worth it to achieve God's plan of salvation. And God himself suffered for us in the form of his Son. God does not exempt himself from human suffering, but enters into it with us. Job grappled with this but realized that he should not just trust God when everything is good. When Job's wife counseled him to "curse God and die," Job did not join her in her weakness, but raised another question: "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" Thus, Job's faith went beyond circumstances. I have a feeling that that's what God is looking for.

The time of Herod's death is listed at 4 B.C. by the Roman rather than the Christian calendar. This leads most scholars to conclude that the medieval monk who created the Christian calendar was a few years off the mark with his first "Year of Our

Lord” or *Ano Domini*. Herod had one of his sons executed for conspiracy five days before his death. He also had hundreds of Judean officials rounded up in the hippodrome, to be put to death when he died. He said he wanted the Jews to have a reason to mourn, rather than rejoice in his death! Fortunately, his sister Salome had them released upon Herod’s death.

Summary of the Inter-Testamental Period

Esther had been reading Matt’s manuscript and at this point she said, “So how would you summarize the world at the time of Jesus’ birth?”

“These years were years of God preparing the world for the entrance of his Son. He had chosen a nation from the descendants of Abraham. He had revealed his Law to Moses. He had forecast the nature of his Son’s incarnation through the prophets.

“But he had also prepared the world through Greek culture and the spread of the Greek language, by which the New Testament could be spread in the early centuries. Even the Roman conquest in 63 B.C. prepared the country to some extent for the events and intrigue of the Gospels.”

Matt thought further about how God had prepared the Jewish people who had come out of Exile and who did not stray again into idolatry. He allowed the development of the synagogue as an educational system in Israel, which produced a highly literate society at the time of Jesus. Remember in Luke 4 that Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue, as was the custom.

By the time of Jesus there were several religious parties, or sects in Judea. The **Pharisees** were the religious conservatives, having developed a complicated system for keeping the law. They had summarized the Law with 613 specific commands. Josephus says they were influential among the townspeople in guiding

religious observance. Their spiritual descendants today are the Orthodox Jews.

On the other hand were the **Sadducees**, the religious liberals of the day. They did not hold to belief in angels, demons, the soul or the afterlife. They lived for the here and now, partly because they were mostly from the upper class living in Jerusalem. The Herodians were a subgroup of these. (Think of the many full-time politicians and lobbyists who live in Washington today.) Their spiritual descendants are the Reformed Jews.

On either extreme were the Zealots and Essenes. The **Zealots** had a similar religious dedication as the Pharisees but wanted to rebel against Rome by force. The **Essenes** wanted to withdraw from this world and await the final apocalyptic events. The Essenes were the smallest group (about 4,000). By the time of the rebellion in A.D. 68 a group of them were living down by the Dead Sea in a community called Qumran. They spent much time copying sacred manuscripts. When the Romans came to crush the rebellion of A.D. 70, the Essenes hid many scrolls in caves around their Dead Sea community.

It was a very violent, cruel time in Judean history. The Herods were cruel. The Romans were quick to execute anyone or group that threatened the *pax romana*, or peace of Rome. Yet, every few years there were rebellions against Rome or the governors from Rome, who also responded ruthlessly.

This was the society in which Jesus grew up in Galilee. Having heard of rebellions, and witnessing the various religious parties, he presented a radical new message. Love one another; love and pray for your enemies, forgive those who transgress against you and let God take revenge. He helped people focus beyond their natural lives to an abundant life that he offered. He claimed to be greater than Solomon and greater than the temple itself. Yet, he did not advocate armed resistance against corrupt government. He spoke of true peace. He was the answer to all the

longings found throughout the Old Testament and the history of God's people.

Summary of Old Testament Messianic Prophecies

It can be shown that there are prophecies and types of Christ in most of the books of the Old Testament. Only one candidate comes close to fulfilling them. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled them all.

In Genesis He is the seed of Abraham who will bless the world. He is the seed of the woman who will crush Satan's head. By the end of the book, we know that the messiah will come from the tribe of Judah (49:10). In Exodus, Jesus is prefigured in the Passover Lamb. In Numbers 24:17 He is the star that will come out of Jacob, a scepter (ruler) out of Israel. In Deuteronomy 18:15 He is a "prophet like" Moses whom the Lord would raise up for the people.

In II Samuel 7:12, God confirms his covenant with David that One from his lineage will reign on the throne of his kingdom forever. David speaks of this coming king Messiah many times in the Psalms. In Psalm 2 He is the royal Son and Anointed One (messiah) (see above, chapter five for the primary messianic psalms). David speaks of Christ's suffering (22), resurrection (16), and exaltation (110). Many specific details are found about Jesus' death in Psalm 22, and almost all of them are beyond his control.

In Job, the messiah is the Redeemer that Job longs for (19:25), and in Ruth He is typified by Boaz, the kinsman Redeemer.

In Isaiah, He is the virgin born Son and Immanuel (God with us) (7:14) who will rule Israel (9:6), yet be a suffering Servant (53).

In Isaiah and Jeremiah (23) He is the Branch from the root of Jesse (David's father).

In Ezekiel 37 He is the glory of God and the greater David.

In Daniel He is the fourth man in the fiery furnace and the Son of Man who comes on clouds of glory (7). He is the Anointed One who will come after the seventy sevens and establish a covenant (9).

In Micah He is the Ruler born in Bethlehem (5:2).

He is the Desire of all nations in Haggai 2 and the King who comes riding on the donkey in Zechariah 9. Finally, He is the Lord you are seeking and the Messenger of the covenant who comes suddenly to his temple in Malachi 3 and 4.

To summarize it in another way, *Halley's Bible Handbook* puts it this way:

He would be introduced to his nation by an Elijah-like forerunner. Galilee to be the scene of His Ministry. He would work Miracles of Healing. And Speak in Parables. Be Rejected by the Leaders of His Own Nation. Be a Smitten Shepherd, a Sufferer, a Man of Sorrows. He would enter Jerusalem riding on a Colt. He would be betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver and that silver would be spent for a potter's field. He would be led as a Lamb to the Slaughter. He would die with the Wicked, opening a Fountain for Sin, Removing Sin in One Day. His dying words were foretold. He would be given gall and vinegar in his agony, hands and feet pierced, not a bone broken. Lots cast for his garment. To be Buried with the Rich. Be in the tomb three days and Rise from the Dead, Ascend to Heaven to the Father's right hand. He would introduce a New Language, a New Idea (salvation), and a New Covenant. He would give God's People a New Name. He would introduce an Era of the Holy Spirit. That His Kingdom would include Gentiles and be Universal and Never End.

The pre-written story of Jesus, recorded Centuries Before Jesus came, is so Astonishing in Detail that it reads like an Eye-witness Account of His Life and Work.⁸³

To this Matt added a hearty Amen. Thus, there are over a hundred specific facts concerning Jesus' life in these Old Testament prophecies. Jesus is the only possible candidate to fulfill even a few of them, much less all of them.

Matt and Esther had now seen the sites of many of these fulfillments. They had seen what they considered to be the actual hill on which the crucifixion took place. It is called Golgotha in the gospels, meaning the "place of the skull". The skull is still there. This site was identified by Lord Gordon in the 1800's. A few yards away is the Garden Tomb excavated around the same time. It fulfills the specifics of the gospel records.



Golgotha (Calvary) in Jerusalem Today

Matt and Esther now had a greater appreciation of the Old Testament and all the events leading up to the life of Christ. They

⁸³ *Halley's Bible Handbook*, 1990 edition, Regency, Zondervan, pg. 401

had every reason to believe the Old Testament as an accurate record of Creation through Redemption.

Matt had now studied all the key events of biblical redemptive history from the Patriarchs up through the Gospels. He had studied the birth and progress of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Perhaps he would someday explore the rest of the prophecies, the ones about the Second Coming of the Messiah.

On their trip to Israel Matt and Esther had seen much evidence of the lands and places of the biblical story. They had even seen a likely spot where the death and resurrection of the promised Messiah had taken place, just as Isaiah had predicted. Indeed, by being crucified between two thieves and buried in a rich man's tomb, he had been "*assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*"⁸⁴



The Garden Tomb excavated in Jerusalem in 1850 a few yards from Golgotha.

⁸⁴ Isaiah 53:9

Isaiah 2: 2-5

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Isaiah 65: 17-19

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

Isaiah 66: 22

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

Chapter Fifteen

Final Judgment/Final Days

Now it was time for Matt to tackle an unpopular subject—judgment. Is the God of the Old Testament really just a God of judgment and wrath, and the God of the New Testament a God of all mercy? He thought of the lyrics of a popular worship song called “Awesome God”:

*Judgment and wrath He poured out on Sodom,
Mercy and grace He gave us at the cross.
I hope that we have not too quickly forgotten
That our God is an Awesome God!⁸⁵*

Matt was sure that this was all about the same God, just as the entire Old and New Testaments were about the same God. Though the concepts had often been distorted, God’s judgment and mercy are evident throughout the Old Testament. Nor was the New Testament solely about God’s mercy. Burns had discovered God’s plan for a partnership with man. Yet, the alternative to that partnership was always bad. It was bad for God because He has a lover’s jealousy for his people, his bride. He both knows and wants the best for his people. He wants to bless them. He is not willing that any of his precious sheep perish.

But God also honors man’s free will. So much so that He decides not to intervene all the time to correct man, but often enough to show mercy. When that intervention, through his prophets and his discipline fails, there is but one logical and just alternative: Judgment. He warned Israel over and over again for hundreds of years before he allowed, or brought, Assyria and Babylon to be instruments of punishment and justice.

⁸⁵ “Awesome God” by Rich Mullins

Disobedience to God always brings injustice to society, which brings further violence and degradation. Man seeks freedom from moral laws, but always winds up in a pig pen of his own making (though we don't always see the results in one generation). Matt could suddenly see how the story of the prodigal son told by Jesus summarized God's experience with mankind in general. The hero of both stories is the Father.

Yet, God also sent his own Son after the prodigal nation. He became flesh and dwelled among us, was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Ultimately "he became sin who knew no sin; that we might become the righteousness of God."⁸⁶

Now that he knew God better, Sodom and Gomorrah no longer seemed like fanciful stories to Matt Burns. Matt and Esther spent their last full day in Israel near the southern end of the Dead Sea. They took the tram up the 1500' escarpment called Masada. From this vantage point they could look over the Dead Sea to the area known for its chemical and salt deposits; the area where there once existed five sinful cities, two of which were Sodom and Gomorrah.

As they looked out Esther remarked, "God tried to warn them didn't he."

Matt replied, "Yes, Abraham prayed for them and hoped his nephew Lot would witness to them. But Lot was not strong enough and enjoyed their company too much to risk their displeasure.

"When God announced his intention to destroy the cities, Abraham interceded and began to bargain with God. At first he asked God to save the cities for fifty righteous people. Then, realizing there were probably not that many he asked, 'Won't you save these cities for ten righteous people?' God agreed, but alas,

⁸⁶ Hebrews 4:15, and II Cor. 5:21.

there were not even ten. So fire and brimstone fell on the cities. Perhaps this was fueled by an eruption of some kind."

"And here we are on Masada being reminded of another judgment, a sad ending for a proud people," mused Esther. She thought of how the last 1,000 Jewish rebels had held out here after the destruction of Jerusalem. Masada had been a fortress and a palace for Herod the Great. The rebels came here after the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

She now realized that God had moved on. He had offered a new covenant in A.D. 30. through Jesus. The majority of the nation and its leaders rejected the covenant and their Messiah. Then it was only a matter of time before judgment fell on a rebellious generation. Jesus spent more than three years warning them and reminding them of all the prophecies concerning him. But pride and position overruled humility and repentance.

Once again the glory had departed from the temple, this time the Second Temple, and its days were numbered. Did not Malachi say that the Lord would suddenly come to his temple to purify the house of Levi? Yet they rejected him when he came.



History had repeated itself when the temple was destroyed for the second time. A couple years later, the freedom fighters on Masada had committed suicide rather than be taken by the

Romans. In a way, their whole society had committed suicide.

Josephus wrote about their descent into civil war and ultimate destruction between A.D. 60 and A.D. 70.

Not only had Jesus witnessed to that generation, but so had the Christian (Messianic) community in Jerusalem for much of the forty years. The apostle James was a constant reminder of the half-brother who had been crucified and risen from the dead. There were thousands of messianic believers in Jerusalem. But James himself was killed by the Sanhedrin in the early sixties. He was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple when he would not renounce Jesus.⁸⁷

Matt broke their silent contemplation with the next obvious question?

“What is going to happen to our nation if we continue to reject God?” He had once believed in liberal causes, but now realized that they were hopeless humanistic band aids for man’s true problem—sin. Yet he remembered the promise of Psalm 33--“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Matt and Esther prayed for the United States.

They realized that much of the Old Testament is a picture of how God deals with any nation who seeks or rejects him. Judgment had fallen on Israel in 722 B.C., 586 B.C., and A.D. 70. Yet, God had mercifully restored a remnant each time—just as He said He would. Now Matt and Esther prayed for the salvation of Israel and the peace of Jerusalem as they looked out over the Dead Sea. They thought of one more prophecy yet to be fulfilled:

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it... then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee

⁸⁷ Josephus, op cit. p. 276

by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

On that day there will be no light (as from heavenly bodies), no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes there will be light.

On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. Zechariah 14: 1-9

This passage refers to the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah. The first coming is referred to in chapter nine, with “See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle (humble) and riding on a donkey”.⁸⁸

It is obvious in Zechariah that there are two comings of Messiah, one for salvation and the other to rule and reign!

Isaiah also ends with the final state of believers. It looks beyond the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, after the restoration of the state of Israel and talks about those who will dwell in the New Jerusalem in the “gardens” of God (Is. 66:17). It is not clear whom the LORD is addressing when He says “your name and your descendants will endure”. Perhaps it is all of true Israel, the Israel of faith spoken of in the New Covenant, consisting of both Jewish and Gentile believers. After all, that is the overall message of Isaiah! And the one thing in history that has drawn these two groups together into one new man is the Messiah!

⁸⁸ Zechariah 9:9

Masada in Late Afternoon Shadows

Isaiah includes glimpses of the final state of blessedness and peace of God's people: no more tears, no violence in the holy mountain, a shelter from the storm and rain. Whether some of this applies to an earthly millennium, it certainly applies to the final state of heavenly blessedness.

Zechariah describes the final state of blessedness in terms of the old Jewish Feast of Tabernacles:

Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.⁸⁹

Such language may seem strange to us, but this is an Old Testament description written so that those folks back then could understand. The ideas that follow include blessedness, the punishment of those who do not worship (or have not worshiped) the King. Foreigners who do worship the God of Israel will be welcome. Those who do not will be under punishment "year after year".

Those who worship will have abundance in water (rain), health (no plagues) and holiness. In fact, everything in the city will be holy, even to the cooking pots. Perhaps there will be no more worrying about what is kosher and what is not!

The last line is very strange to modern ears: "*And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.*" This stands for some element of pagan culture, whether their idolatry, or worldly trade. This is not to say that modern day residents of Canaan (Palestine) cannot be saved if they come to the God of Israel through the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, some of them are being saved and will be in the New Jerusalem with us!

⁸⁹ Zechariah 14:16

Joel 2: 28-32

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, you old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Amos 9:11-15

In that day I will restore David's fallen tent (tabernacle). I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things...New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.

Acts 15:12-18

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will

restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' that have been known for ages.

Chapter Sixteen

Messianics Then and Now

Jewish culture continues today in several streams. There are Orthodox Jews, Conservative and Reformed. There are some cultural Jews who are atheists and a growing number that are Messianic, meaning they have accepted Yeshua as their Messiah. The Messianics still honor the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament, but they believe that the New Testament completes the Old, just as Jesus completes their Judaism.

John the Baptist, Simeon, Anna and many others in the gospel story were the first Jews to believe that Messiah had come. They and thousands of others in the first century were the first Messianic believers. Today, the term once again denotes people of Jewish background who receive Yeshua of Nazareth as Messiah. At the same time, more and more Gentile Christians (Greek for Messianic) are rediscovering their Jewish roots.

In the first century, the followers of Jesus grew to tens of thousands in Israel. On the Day of Pentecost, you will recall that 3,000 accepted Jesus and a couple of years later the number was more than 5,000 men! That means the Messianic community could have numbered 20,000 in Jerusalem. Through sharing the gospel and persecutions, thousands of other believers accepted Jesus throughout the rest of the nation.

While never the majority in Israel, they eventually outnumbered the Pharisees. After being displaced from the land of Israel, they spread throughout the Roman Empire. Over the next three hundred years, they were still a significant group within an increasingly Gentile church. Unfortunately in the fourth century, and in defiance of the Apostle Paul's directives in Romans 9-11, the church divorced itself from its Jewish roots. Instead, it married paganism and allowed several forms of idolatry to come into the

faith. Instead of a thousand year millennium (or so called City of God on earth), a thousand year captivity of corruption came to the church. This did not happen all at once, but gradually many compromises were made that changed and corrupted the original Christian church. Many of these things would not have happened if the church had stayed true to its Jewish roots.

Reforms started in the 1300's that culminated in the Reformation in the 1500's. Throughout these centuries, there was much Christian anti-Semitism. The divorce from Judaism remained in effect well into the twentieth century and helps explain the rise of Nazi anti-Semitism.

Out of the ashes of the Holocaust and new Jewish state was born in Palestine. In 1948 the statehood of Israel was proclaimed and recognized by the United Nations. Since then the U.N. has pretty much turned its back on this fledgling nation. Fortunately, the U.S. also recognized the state of Israel and has been her ally for most of these years. Many American Christians and Jews believe that those who support the children of Abraham will be blessed. Through five wars and two intifada uprisings, God has helped Israel against overwhelming odds to survive and prosper. Meanwhile, Israel has literally made the desert bloom and filled the world with fruit.

In Acts 15 the church met to consider how to let the Gentiles in, knowing that this was part of God's plan for the gospel. They gave the Gentile converts a few basic guidelines and welcomed them into the fold. This was seen as part of the fulfillment of the Amos prophecy. At that time, it was not appropriate to quote the rest of the prophecy about national Israel's restoration, because the nation was under God's judgment.

However, Jesus had taught them that there would come a time of national restoration.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and the leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

*Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.*⁹⁰

Jesus is teaching about the time of his return and that “it” would be associated with Israel’s restoration. The fig tree of Matthew 24 referred to a nation that was then under discipline, but would one day turn green again. In fact, Jesus linked this with other last days events approaching the time of his second coming. Moreover, in Luke 21 Jesus said specifically that “Jerusalem would be trampled upon until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” While it is easy for Gentile Christians to discard these texts, they are there for a reason.

Now, in a reversal of history that is almost humorous, Gentile Christians debate the role of Jewish believers who have accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Perhaps we are seeing another part of the David’s tabernacle prophecy being fulfilled. A restoration of full orbed, Davidic worship of the Psalms is taking place in the church. Not that the church is becoming Jewish, but that it is once again recognizing the roots of our faith and even our spiritual existence. As Paul said in Romans 11:17-24 God is able to graft the natural (Jewish) branches back in:

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted, but they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Consider the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not

⁹⁰ Matthew 24:32, 33

persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

It seems that God is encouraging a humility here that is sometimes lacking among Gentile Christians. We can be so ethnocentric that we simply forget about Jews. We assume that God has no plan for them or concern for them, forgetting even to share the gospel with them. Yet, this very passage warns us to not be boastful or arrogant. We act as though God cannot do whatever he wants with this group of people. Yet, there are several Scriptures that indicate that God indeed has a plan to “graft them in again.” I don’t pretend to know exactly what that plan is, but we are actually seeing part of it right now. How?

Once again there is a substantial movement of messianic Jews. Never have there been so many since the first century. It seems to be linked to the timing of Israel’s rebirth as a nation. Indeed, there are more messianic Jews in Israel than at any time since the first century.

Many prophecies that were once dismissed by replacement theology are seeming to come true.⁹¹ Isaiah asked if a nation can be born in a day.⁹² That happened in 1948. Isaiah also spoke of a second regathering from all the nations.⁹³ Ezekiel talks of both national and spiritual restoration in chapters 36-37. While some of this can be seen in the time of return from Exile, much of it sounds more like modern times. Verse 28 of chapter 37 makes this statement, “Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.” Surely this was not fulfilled in the first century. Only a minority of them received the Davidic king (Jesus) and then the remainder was scattered for centuries.

⁹¹ The theology that the Gentile church has permanently replaced Israel in God’s plan.

⁹² Isaiah 66:8

⁹³ Is. 11:10

Only a remnant of first century Jews received their Messiah and were given new hearts (36:26) and spiritual rebirth (37:14). Nor have we seen the cleansing of Israel as spoken of in this chapter, even though they are dwelling “in the land, on the mountains of Israel” (verses 22, 23). Whether these things are fulfilled in an earthly millennium or in the heavenly Jerusalem on the new heaven and new earth is yet to be seen. However, there is much to look forward to. While many nations continue to come against Israel, God has an ultimate victory planned.

A number of years ago Henry Blackaby made an insightful comment to the effect that we should “find out what God is doing and join Him there.”⁹⁴ God is certainly at work in a national and spiritual restoration of Jews today. Why has God once again allowed so many of them to be concentrated in one place again, their ancestral home? The Arabs assume that it will be easier for them to kill the Jews there. But it will also make it easier for God to save the Jews there.

What about Jerusalem? Jesus said that the time of the Gentile domination would come to an end. That happened for the first time in 2,000 years in 1967. In the Six-Day war, perpetrated by the buildup of Arabs for an invasion of Israel, the Israelis defeated Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and other combatants. Israel took the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Sinai. While this created some additional refugee problems, Israel has governed these areas fairly, and needs them for self-defense. They withdrew from the Sinai in the peace settlement.

Since 1967 more and more Gentile Christians have become concerned with Israel’s safety and salvation, although they continue to be largely a secular nation. More and more Christians have made trips (pilgrimages) to Israel in the last thirty years. The ease and affordability of air travel has certainly added to this phenomenon. More and more believers are going during the Feast of Tabernacles to celebrate with Israel the idea that God wants to

⁹⁴ Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God*

tabernacle with them. The trickle of Jewish messianics has become a stream as hundreds and thousands accept Yeshua and congregations are multiplying in Israel and in other areas of the world.

These folks are not giving up their Jewishness to accept Yeshua, nor should we ask them to. (In the first century, Paul gave believers the option of celebrating feasts and Sabbaths, so long as they did not judge each other.) Messianics often meet on Friday night or Saturday morning, celebrate the main feasts and celebrate with Davidic worship. They have a reverence for the Torah that most Gentiles lack toward the whole Bible. They have a great appreciation for the holiness of God balanced with the work of the Holy Spirit. They try to bridge the gulf that exists between Gentile Christians and Jews.

In addition, Paul continued to attend synagogue services and fellowship with Jews in order to win some of them. He even made a temple vow thirty years after he was saved!⁹⁵ We also forget that the early church met in the temple courts as long as they were permitted and until they were driven out by persecution. Sometimes messianic and non-messianic synagogues existed side by side in various cities.

Obviously, Paul saw an increasing hardening of the Jews and wrote about it Romans 9-11. But far from saying God was finished with the Jews, he saw it as a temporary phenomenon.

So What Now?

“Don’t you think God wants us to do more than passively watch world events?” said Esther passionately.

“A lot of Christians seem to stay in their own little world,” agreed Matt.

⁹⁵ Acts 21:26

“Don’t you think we need to actively support what God is doing?” she pressed him.

“Well, you’re in good company with some pastors I’ve read.”

A few years ago, a British Bible teacher Derek Prince raised the bar higher when he began to actively support Israel and encourage people to pray for her. He spent his life preaching and teaching about our debt to Israel and our need to support her. In pointing out Britain’s abandonment of Israel he points out an overriding principle: “The moral responsibilities of government go beyond mere calculations of economic or military expedience.”⁹⁶

But we have personal responsibility as well, as members of the Christian community. Prince believes that the continuation of Israel is a miracle. “Simply stated, each day that Israel continues to exist represents one more miracle.”⁹⁷ The need for Jewish people to have a homeland was discussed by millions of people in the twentieth century. For awhile, it looked like Jews might be assimilated into other societies. But the Holocaust brought their true situation into stark relief; they would not be safe anywhere without a homeland. That is the lesson of history right through the twentieth century.

Our study of the Old Testament shows it to be the case. They were not destined to live in Babylon/Persia forever. As long as there are Hamans and Hitlers, the world is not safe for Jews. Germany, a modern “enlightened, industrial society” did no better than ancient Persia. Besides there are spiritual forces at work.

As Esther read over this, she asked, “But why do so many think that what happens to Israel or the Jews is inconsequential?”

⁹⁶ *Promised Land*, Derek Prince, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, 1982, 2005,

Pg.48

⁹⁷ Ibid. pg. 54

“Well, I think they forget how Jesus wept over Jerusalem and his people who were going to reject him, their only hope of salvation. They also forget how Paul anguished over his people according to the flesh almost thirty years later. If we are going to follow their example, we should care. We know what Jesus would do.

Derek Prince also believes that Christians should take some ownership for centuries of anti-Semitism, even though we may not have been personally responsible.

If we desire to be identified with that one Church, then our identification must go all the way. We cannot claim inheritance in the good that has come down to us through the Church, and yet disassociate ourselves from the evil. In particular, we must accept our share of responsibility for Christian anti-Semitism, and then do everything in our power to rectify the situation.⁹⁸

On a more positive note, Prince encourages Christians to respond to Israel’s re-gathering based on Jeremiah 31:7-8:

This is what the LORD says: “Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the greatest of the nations. Make your praises heard and say, ‘O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.’”

Believers should praise for three reasons: first because God requires it; second, because the re-gathering of Israel is confirmation that the Bible is true, relevant and up-to-date; and third, because praise is an appropriate expression of Christian compassion. How can we expect to influence Jews with our faith if we do not show them concern and compassion? Besides, the LORD never told us to quit praying for the “peace of Jerusalem”—Ps. 122:6.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Pg. 111

Crescendo and Final Movement

If one would compare the Old Testament to a symphony, there is a crescendo and summary in the final movement. Matt Burns had discovered some key themes in the Old Testament. He found structure for life in the Law of Moses. He found the nature of God and his Divine Design in the universe as well as in human life and relationships. He found the holiness of God as something to be revered and lifted up.

Yet, he saw the corruption and weakness of man as he failed over and over again to be true to God's high calling. The corruption manifests itself both in the iniquity of man's character and the actual trespasses of God's commandments. In other words, we have a sin problem. It was born in rebellion in the Garden of Eden and has plagued mankind ever since.

In the Old Testament Matt had seen principles of separation of power. The kings and priests were not to usurp one another's roles or powers, but were actually a check on each other. Prophets were also independent voices representing God to the people of Israel. Only in the Messiah could these offices be safely combined.

The Law of Moses introduced a just law system that was far advanced over anything in the history of man, even up to this day. Only in the twentieth century was this view seriously challenged in Western culture.

Matt had seen the prominence of the nation and land of Israel in God's plan and in prophecies yet to be fulfilled. While Israel was exiled from her land on more than one occasion, God never granted it to any other people. Even until the twentieth century, it was desolate and barren, as if waiting for the return of its legitimate inhabitants. The Arabs only claimed ownership after the rise of Zionism and the resettlement by Jews. Before that they had only cared about one holy site in Israel, the temple mount.

While the Jews have always allowed control and access of that site, the Muslims are offended that Israel even exists.

Matt had seen great judgment in Noah's flood; he had seen great prayers, like David's at the end of his monarchy (I Chron. 29). He had seen the greatest miracle prior to the resurrection of Christ; the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the dividing of the Red Sea and their conquest of the promised land.

Yet, Matt had seen an incomplete story, hundreds of prophecies waiting to be fulfilled at the end of the Old Testament period. Over a hundred were pointing to the Messiah. And many others were pointing to the national restoration and salvation of Israel. He had appreciated the grandeur and scope of major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Moreover, while some discount the Minor Prophets, he had seen that there is actually a crescendo as one reads these last dozen books of the Old Testament: Messiah is Coming!

Hosea said "he will come to us like winter and spring rains" (Ch. 6). "On the third day he will restore us." Then he likens Israel to a vine and a fig tree. (9:10)

Joel spoke of the coming age of the Holy Spirit, when he would be poured out on all flesh and that salvation would be available for those who "call on the name of the LORD". He also spoke of Israel's national restoration.

Amos talked of rebuilding and replanting. The fallen tabernacle of David would be rebuilt and the people would be replanted in their land.

Micah promised a kingdom of peace; that in the last days, people would say "come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord" and gather the lame and the exiles. He also said the ruler (messiah) would come out of Bethlehem (5:2).

Habakkuk proclaimed that the “just will live by faith” (2:4), as opposed to just keeping laws and commandments.

Zephaniah told the people “Rejoice, daughter of Zion, for the LORD has taken your punishment (3:14-17). He further states that he is “Mighty to save, will delight over them and rejoice over them with singing.”

Haggai looks forward to a greater glory coming to the rebuilt temple (2:6-9). He says the “desired of all nations will come” and bring peace.

Zechariah speaks of national restoration and revival of Zion. The Lord says he is “zealous over Zion” and will come to live in Jerusalem (8). He speaks of “your king coming to you gentle and riding on a donkey” (9). In the last days there will be cleansing from sin, Jerusalem will be an immovable rock, and eventually the Lord will return and split the Mount of Olives. Here again we see two comings of the king, one in humility and one in triumph. This is followed by the great last battle and the eternal victory of God.

Finally Malachi speaks of the sudden appearance of the messenger. “Suddenly, the messenger of the covenant will come to his temple.” Then he will purify and refine God’s people. The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. While there are glimpses of final judgment in these books, the overriding message is the coming king, Messiah.

This is why the Old Testament is incomplete and needs the New to show where prophecies have been fulfilled and continue to be fulfilled until Jesus comes again.

Matt Burns could not help but be overwhelmed by the power of these prophecies and paused to give thanks to Almighty God who knows the end from the beginning. Esther agreed with this summary and concluded, “these are all the more reasons to

praise and worship our God, and share these truths with others. May God grant those opportunities in the short time we have left.”

And so Matt typed in the final words of exhortation to whoever would read them: “And so we should all be ready for the great crescendo and final movement of God’s great symphony of salvation.”

Discussion Questions and Study Guide

Chapter One

Why have many concluded that Genesis is irrelevant to modern man?

What is the biggest unanswered question in the theory of evolution?

What explains the differences between chapters one and two of Genesis?

What is the biggest obstacle to most people to accepting the Genesis account of creation?

What evidence is there that Abraham and Moses were educated men?

What possible explanations are there for early men living for hundreds of years?

Chapter Two

What geological evidence favors a cataclysmic flood?

What was the first cause of the flood according to Genesis 7:11?

Why do scientists tend to accept evolution and reject design?

What people and organizations have opposed this trend?

How does the history of human language groups seem to support the Bible's account of Genesis 11?

What is a recently discovered evidence of design in the study of life?

How could Darwin's misunderstanding of God have led him to false conclusions?

Chapter Three

What are the main spiritual lessons from Abraham?

How is Joseph like Christ?

What situation led to slavery in Egypt?

Explain the call of Moses.

What part of the Red Sea crossing have you not thought about before?

Why do we need structure for life?

What commandments have been largely abandoned by our society?

Chapter Four

Where did the pattern for the Tabernacle come from?

Describe the three main areas of the Tabernacle.

What is the prophetic significance of a restored Tabernacle?

Why is God called a jealous God?

List the seven feasts and their significance.

What are some of the duties of the priests?

Why did it take forty years of wandering in the wilderness before Israel reached the Promises Land?

How have you grown in your worship of God during your Christian walk?

Chapter Five

Why is Deuteronomy called the “second law”?

Has the Documentary Hypothesis been refuted?

In what ways did God supply the Israelites in the wilderness?

What do the various divine names of God reveal about Him?

What are the two miracles associated with Israel’s conquest of Canaan?

What would the inhabitants of Jericho have thought when the Israelites appeared on the opposite side of the Jordan River?

Chapter Six

Who were some of the Judges of Israel?

Why did God want Gideon to only have 300 soldiers?

Compare Samuel to Saul.

How does David’s life differ from Saul’s?

How does David organize worship in Jerusalem?

Describe Solomon’s temple.

How does the temple worship compare to our worship today?

What parallels are there?

Chapter Seven

What lessons do we learn from Job?
What principles of praise do we learn from the Psalms?
What are some of the different types of Psalms?
List the main Messianic Psalms.
What books did Solomon write?
Who were some of the good kings of Judah?
What spiritual lessons do we learn from the kingdom period?

Chapter Eight

Why is Isaiah called the messianic prophet?
What were his other themes?
List some of the important messianic references.
What great miracle is found in the middle of the book (chapters 36-39)?
Who is introduced in chapters 42-53?
What characteristics are revealed about the servant?
What other passages of Isaiah have glimpses of Jesus' ministry?
How are passages like Isaiah 41 and 42 like God's Facebook?
What do the Dead Sea Scrolls show us about Isaiah's authenticity?

Chapter Nine

Why would Jeremiah be considered a “bad news prophet”?
What are two of Jeremiah’s positive prophecies (chs.23,31)?
What kinds of apostasy do we see today?
What can we learn from something as sad as Lamentations?
What possibly happened to the ark when the city fell?
How long was their captivity to last?
What is the one bright spot in Lamentations?

Chapter Ten

What do we learn from Ezekiel’s vision of the glory of God?
Why do many people see 1948 as a key to end time events?
Is there a coalition emerging today similar to Ezekiel 38?

What will stop those enemies coming against Israel?
What are the four kingdoms shown to Daniel?
How does Daniel's vision (the Seventy Sevens) give a time frame for Messiah?
What are the main things the Messiah will accomplish (9:24)?
How do Daniel's timeline and other prophecies limit the window of time for Messiah?
Do you think there is a conspiracy against truth (see Romans 1)?

Chapter Eleven

Why does Haman hate Mordecai and the Jews?
How does Esther become the queen?
What other anti-Semitism does this story remind you of?
How is Haman's plot foiled?
How do the Jews celebrate this deliverance?
How does Ruth show her loyalty to Naomi and the God of Israel?
How does God reward Ruth's faith?
How do the mountains of Israel illustrate Christ's ministry and the believer's experience of salvation?

Chapter Twelve

Who gave the exiles permission to return to their home?
Who were the leaders of Israel in 536 B.C.?
Who ordered that the city could be rebuilt about eighty years later?
Who were the partners in that effort?
What does Zechariah say will be the dual role of the Branch (Messiah)?
What events are foretold in Zechariah 9-14?
What evidence is there for revival among Jews today?
What was Nehemiah's main task?
What feast did Israel restore under Nehemiah and Ezra?

Chapter Thirteen

What is the setting of Malachi?
Who are the “messengers” in the book?
What is the significance of the temple prophecy, according to Michael Brown?
What is the beautiful promise of chapter four?
Where should believers give their tithe (first responsibility)?
In what ways were the next four hundred years “not so silent”?
What were the four periods of the four hundred years?
How does the story of Hanukkah fit into this time period?

Chapter Fourteen

How did King Herod set the stage for Christ?
How did Herod try to destroy Christ?
What main religious groups developed among the Jews during this time period?
What are your favorite prophecies about Jesus?
List some of the titles for Christ given in the prophetic summary.
How many (approximately) specific prophecies of Jesus are found in the Old Testament?

Chapter Fifteen

What does Matt conclude about the nature of God as portrayed in the Old and New Testaments?
What is the result of man choosing to ignore God?
What parallels do you see between ancient Israel and modern America?
What will happen at and after the second coming of Jesus?
Do you think Isaiah is talking about the millennium or heaven , or both, in his prophecies about the final state?
Summarize the two comings of Jesus?

Chapter Sixteen

Who are the “messianics”?

Name some other groups (sects) of Jews today.

What happened when the church left its Jewish roots?

What rose out of the ashes of the Holocaust?

What prophecies given by Jesus refer to twentieth century events?

What was Paul’s prophecy (and mystery) about the Jews (Romans 11)?

Why have Christians recently become more interested in Israel?

What are the things Christians can do to join God in the things He is doing today?

About the Author

Mark Barbee has been in ministry for over thirty-five years. He grew up in Columbus, Ohio and graduated from the Ohio State University with a degree in Social Studies Education and concentration in history. He completed his Masters degree at Cincinnati Christian Seminary. Since 1985 he has been a pastor at the Fairfield Christian Church in Lancaster, Ohio.

He has written four historical fiction treatments of the gospels and one on the book of Acts. He also wrote a short non-fiction book entitled *Israel: The Twentieth Century Miracle*. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities at the church, Mark has also been a worship leader and speaker. He occasionally teaches for the Ohio Christian University.

Mark resides with his wife Lori in Lancaster and they have three children and five grandchildren. He enjoys travel, music and golf. In 2009 Mark and Lori traveled to Israel. In 2010 he became part of the advisory board for the Alliance for the Future of Israel.

You can contact Pastor Mark Barbee at 740-687-5652, or by email at Mbarbee@columbus.rr.com.